CROSS-SECTION

A Collection of New American Writing

EDITED BY EDWIN SEAVER

PS
536
C72
v.1
1944

KRAUS REPRINT
NENDELN, LIECHTENSTEIN
1969

Reprinted with the permission of
Edwin Seaver
by
KRAUS REPRINT
a Division of
KRAUS-THOMSON ORGANIZATION LIMITED
Nendeln, Liechtenstein
1969
Printed in Switzerland

Contents

Introduction Edwin Seaver vii

The Resurrection *Novelette* Prudencio de Pereda 3

I, My Ancestor *Story* Nancy Wilson Ross 38

American Gothic *Story* Betty Baur 46

The Man Who Lived Underground *Novelette* Richard Wright 58

More Like Home *Story* Brendan Gill 102

The Death of García Lorca *Dramatic Poem* Robert Whittington 112

Last Visit *Story* Christopher Lazare 126

Fingers *Story* Robert Ramsey 141

Small Epic, Illustrating the Romance in Business Success *Poem* Isidor Schneider 151

Possess One World *Story* Morton Fineman 158

On Earth Good Will *Story* Frederick Ebright 173

My Wife the Witch *Novelette* Ira Wolfert 179

Oak Shadows *Story* John D. Weaver 217

Horse with Hoof of Fire *Story* Edita Morris 223

Nat Turner *Play* Paul Peters 229

The Last Day *Story* Rosemary Paris 281

Behold the Child among His Newborn Blisses *Story* Shirley Jackson 292

In the Library *Poem* Helen Wolfert 298

Low Sky *Story* Carl Ruthven Offord 304

Trouble Keeping Quiet *Story* Leonard Wallace Robinson 313

A Calculus at Heaven *Novelette* Norman Mailer 317

Goodbye, Goodbye! *Story* Marjorie Stengel 354

Flashlight *Story* Lenore G. Marshall 364

A Guatemalan Idyll *Novelette* Jane Bowles 368

The New *War and Peace*: a Speculation Stanley Edgar Hyman 396

The Face of the Earth *Poem* Charles Henri Ford 414

Two Poems Oscar Williams 417

Two Poems Edwin Honig 418

Three Poems Jean Garrigue 421

Two Poems Robert Tallman 424

Five Poems Will Gibson 428

Introduction *Poem* Norman Rosten 429

Three Poems Langston Hughes 433

Man With His Head Between His Hands *Poem* Saul Gottlieb 436

Detroit: June 1943 *Poem* Irwin Stark 439

Mountain Village *Poem* Paul Alexander Bartlett 439

The Rock, the Man and the Mountain *Poem* Norman Macleod 440

Let the Sun Pour In *Novelette* Henry Stone 441

A Tin Halo for the Sergeant *Story* Jay Williams 464

Flying Home *Story* Ralph Ellison 469

The Man Who Had All the Luck *Play* Arthur Miller 486

Notes on the Contributors 553

Introduction

This book, as its subtitle states, is offered as a collection of new American writing. Since even the commonest terms—especially the commonest terms—mean different things to different people, I ought perhaps to explain how I use the words "new" and "American" in reference to the pages that follow.

By "American" I imply no mystery of blood or soil, but simply writing by Americans. And by "new" I do not mean different, or fashionable, or experimental; I merely mean writing that has not previously been published.

I hesitate to indulge in any generalizing about the nature of American literature today on the basis of the material to be found in *Cross-Section,* lest in my drawing certain conclusions from this material the reader assume that these were in fact the prejudices behind its selection. I had no such prejudices. Not that there is anything wrong about a book of this kind having a frank editorial bias, either aesthetic, or political, or what you will; on the contrary, there is much to be gained in the way of unity and concentration. But in undertaking to edit *Cross-Section,* my only conviction was that there was probably a lot of worthwhile writing around which for one reason or another was not getting published, a number of young authors who deserved a hearing. There can never be enough publications open to new writers.

Certainly this was true of normal times. But the times are far from normal, and good writers, I was informed when I was about to undertake this book, were as scarce as other consumer goods. Editors of popular magazines, whose pleasure it is to pay fancy prices for fancy stories, assured me they were looking high and low for good stuff; in fact, the situation was so desperate, they declared, they were even forced to accept an unusual story now and then. I knew, too, that the publishers were ready to offer a promising young author a thousand dollar advance at the drop of a hat, provided, of course, the book he had in mind was not poetry, or unpublished short stories, or a novelette of insufficient wordage, or anything else that had as dubious sales possibilities as most of the novels and factual books that are apparently published without hesitation. Even some of the more enlightened motion picture companies, I was told, were ready to advance money on a book in progress—if it had a likely story idea for the pictures. If cash could make a great literature, how great a literature we should have.

It was therefore not without some doubts as to whether the manuscripts I had in mind existed anywhere outside my own imagination that, early in the summer of 1943, I sent a notice to literary editors, which many of them very kindly printed in their columns, to the effect that *Cross-Section* was open for business. The response was so immediate and so prolific, I had indeed started such an avalanche of manuscripts thundering in my direction, that I did not dare send out a second notice, except a cease-and-desist order on November 1, which had been set as the closing date for offerings. These offerings came from civilians in practically every state of the Union, and from men in the service both at home and in various foreign parts of the globe. In all, well over a thousand manuscripts were received, faithfully read, and accepted or rejected by the editor on the basis of what he considered to be their merit. The final task of selecting the fifty-one manuscripts to be found in this book was not altogether a happy one, for there were at least as many others worthy of further consideration.

Although, as I have said, I am wary of formulating any critical generalizations on the basis of the material submitted, certain facts may be worthy of mention. An astonishing number of the manuscripts received, for instance, had to do with racial injustice in this country; specifically, with what we call the "Negro problem" when we want to avoid being troubled about it unduly. (Curiously enough, there were hardly any that had to do with the "Jewish problem," and this in a time of unparalleled catastrophe to the Jewish people.) These manuscripts came from both Negro and white authors and would seem to indicate that our writers are not quite as free from "the preoccupations, the feelings of remorse" as André Gide supposed in his *Imaginary Conversation* on present-day American literature.

Then, too, very little of the material submitted had to do with the present world conflict, although a number of the manuscripts were concerned with the Civil War in Spain—or rather, the fascist invasion of Spain. Does this mean that our writers are still trying to digest, creatively, the great betrayals that led up to the war and are not yet ready for the war itself? It seems likely that this may be so.

In a year when war books—that is to say, correspondents' books, or eyewitness accounts—were multiplying like rabbits, I received no documentary writing or reporting worth publishing. But then there is a very large and profitable market for this kind of writing, most of which is done on assignment, and that may be the reason.

Much more serious was the almost total absence of critical writing. I do not know whether, as Edmund Wilson recently stated, "our literary movements have spent themselves, and the forces of the times are against the arts," but they certainly seem to be against ideas. Our American literature has always suffered from a lack of criticism, a continuum of tradition and ideas, but it is doubtful if the intellectual climate has ever been so bleak.

I made mention above of André Gide's *Imaginary Conversation* on present-day American literature which was first published in the French

(Algiers) review *Fontaine,* and recently in translation in *The New Republic.* In this essay, Monsieur Gide discusses the "new" American writers, mentioning specifically Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell and Dashiell Hammett. Now, with the exception of Steinbeck, whose principal works—*In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*—were products of the nineteen-thirties, all these writers belong to the twenties and none of them, in the years between, has added an important inch to his creative stature. Some of what Monsieur Gide has to say of these writers is mildly pertinent to American literature in the twenties, but when he discusses Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* or Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* as new books, he leaves something to be desired.

If we want to talk of new writers, it seems to me, we must turn not to the writers of the twenties or the thirties, but to those of the present decade. With but two or three exceptions, all the writers in this book belong to the forties. Some of them have never published before; others have appeared only in the "little" magazines; still others, although they have already one or more books to their credit, have not yet attained their full stature as authors. It was for all of these that *Cross-Section* was conceived. If several, if even one new writer of importance is "discovered" in these pages, the venture will have been worthwhile.

EDWIN SEAVER

CROSS-SECTION

PRUDENCIO DE PEREDA

The Resurrection

TODAY BARCELONA FELL! ON THE MORROW WE WILL TAKE MADRID! It glared warmly across the page in a red-letter headline. (Today, the war is over! Tomorrow, all hope will be dead.) The paper was a thin, little paper, thinner even than the ordinary Spanish newspapers were. I had it flat on the stone bench with the full sheet spread out, and I was staring at it and waiting to see if the impact of this would come to me, when he stepped very quietly up to my shoulder and began to laugh suddenly, and then, he read it out in a sing-song voice: Today, Barcelona; Madrid, tomorrow! The Marxist cause has at last been broken by our glorious. . . .

He tapped me smartly on the shoulder, "That means you, Mickito," he said. "Your cause is lost."

"My cause, Fausto?"

"Marxism, communism! That's yours, isn't it?"

"I'm not a Communist, Fausto. A Marxist, neither," I said to him. Do you think I would be drying up here, I was thinking, wasting here, like this, if those were my 'causes,' as you say it so nicely? Listening to you here, like this, politely; worrying a little, even, about what you are thinking? Fausto, you fool!

I was staying with my aunt in my father's old pueblo, Mozares, in Burgos province. It was a conservative town in a solid Rebel state, and he was the single bastard in it.

"You're changing, now, eh?" he said.

"Changing? How, changing?"

"You don't talk like a Red, any more—like you used to talk the last time," he said. The 'last time' was my first visit to Spain in 1933. "You don't talk very much to the people here at all. Of course, I can't tell very well because I was never in on those big discussions that used to be held around you, but I look about me these days and I see that you don't talk hardly at all to the people here. You don't like the people here any more, Kito?"

"I like the people here," I said.

"Excepting me, of course," Fausto said.

I did not say anything, but smiled a little at him. He grinned very broadly. He had been grinning all of the time that he had been talking to me.

On that first trip to Spain, I had stayed four of the six months in Mozares. That had been just after graduation, and I had been eager and anxious to get started at something then, but my father's sister, my aunt Felipa, had been very much concerned over my pale, indoors look, and had insisted that I stay there in Mozares so that she could look after me very closely. She was a little afraid of the cities, too, I think. The theater was still a place of sin and she truly believed that scruples and inhibitions could not outlast the light of day. Then, too, I was the first of our family to go back to Spain, and I think that she wanted to keep me there because of that. She was very wonderful and kind to me.

And then all of that eagerness and energy went out into talking with the people of Mozares and the other towns around there about those things that I was beginning to feel very strongly, and into argument for them. The Republic of Spain was two years old, then. It was going very badly. I hated Azaña and his indecision, but I wanted the Republic to get above him and go up. I talked on and argued as if I could push it over his steady stupidity with my mouth, and I forgot the embarrassment I used to feel talking Spanish, because I had to think very hard of the things that I was saying.

They were Catholic and very Conservative, but they did not resent it, nor even mind it a little. I think that they liked it. I was 'el Señorito' to them. I was from New York. I had a college degree, a well-cut suit, ties, and I shaved every morning. They had not been used to talking with these 'Señoritos.'

Once, Emeterio said to me, while I blushed very, very red, "You know? You're a pleasure! One can talk to you. You come from the city, but one can talk to you here and enjoy it. One can like it very much!"

I liked it very much, too. I had wanted above all else to be listened to, and they listened eagerly and responded quickly and well. They almost always disagreed with what I said, but the discussions only grew livelier because of this opposition. I had been very happy. I was being appreciated!

Me, happy? Had I said happy? That must have been a very long time ago, I think now. I can never be happy again. And I don't want to say anything, now. No. Nor to tell anyone what I believe! I don't believe anything, I think. Happy—me? Sure! That must have been me! I was alive, then. I think I'm dead, now.

And this Fausto who was standing before me now and grinning happily was glad about it all. "You won't last long," he had told me. "You fellows won't be around here long. You wait and see, Kito!"

He was looking at 'Kito' now, with that grinning face and the two shrewd eyes that were trying to search out the little undercurrent of fear all living people in Spain must have in this time, but he could not see it. It was not there, now. Mickito, this 'Kito,' was dead and drained. He did not believe me when I said it. Only living people could keep that fear. I let him stare his grinning face at me while I was thinking.

"All the enthusiasm is gone, eh?" he said suddenly.

"It's all gone," I said.

"Is this losing of the war killing it?" he said. He had stopped grinning. "That's right, isn't it? Without joking, I can truly tell that."

"That and other things," I said, and I held my breath a little while I waited for him to ask, what other things?, because I could not talk to him about those 'other things,' and I was sure that he knew, anyway.

But he did not ask that. He just began to grin idiotically again and patted my shoulder very softly. He pointed down to the paper. "Don't read it," he said. "It won't be good for you."

Then he turned around and went down into the pueblo, and I stood and watched his back walk away. I could not even feel like running suddenly up to it and punching that back, or striking higher up in the neck.

Fausto, at least, knew me in this town. Fausto, at least, had me set and understood well. And because in the old days, when I was alive and moving to things, he had never liked to talk to me, he seemed to want to speak to me at every chance, now. Not always talking with speech that is spoken to the face, but often with a grin or with smiling eyes of 'victory'!

The others of the pueblo were all kinder. They walked a little apart from me and spoke to me only to say, "Good day!" in the morning, or "Adios!" during the day. These are the things that all Spaniards must say to those who live with them and all of the time I knew that it was being very hard for them to keep away from me like this. Most of them were my relatives, and all of them were my friends from that last happy visit, and I kept thinking that they must all be feeling now: this war will soon be over. We should forget our differences in belief right now, at this same time, and get a head start then on peace and love.

One night, Anastasio stayed late at my uncle's tavern and drank a lot of wine. I was sitting outside on the bench by the door. When he came out to leave, he sat down beside me and began to talk. He was a little drunk but very coherent.

"We should be with you all the time, now," he was saying soon. "You were our friend here. Our good friend—a very true friend to us! Then you went back home and had all those bad troubles there." (Disgustos, he said in Spanish. It is a polite word but much stronger than its English near-equivalent may seem it to be.)

"You come back here to us and we cannot even condole with you," Anastasio said. "Cannot entrust you strongly and immediately with our sympathy and help. We can't! No!" he said. "Because of stupid politics! Yes, stupid politics! They are tragic, but they are stupid. And so the thing that results is that you must burn your soul alone.

"I want to talk to you," Anastasio said. "I have wanted to very many times. But I am an old man, and nobody thinks that I am anything. I'm truly considered a little foolish."

"But I . . . " I jumped to say.

"No!" the old man said. "No! It's all right. That's all right! Don't be kind to me." Anastasio was seventy years old. He had always said that he could have been dead and resting, now, if the young men had not been called away and left the work to the old men. He put his hand on my shoulder very lightly. "Well, good now!" he said. "I have truly wanted to come and be with you—to talk to you. Many times! These very many times—but I cannot feel that I deserve to. In these times we must have special reasons for doing even the things we want to do, the things we feel we must do. Force is dominating us! You see, niño?"

"I see, Anastasio."

"But Manuel! There's Manuel—Manuel could be with you! Manuel could be a sympathetic friend to you, now. You were a brother to his son when you were with us here before." (Luciano, Manuel's son had been very kind to me. He had been the first of the tight young crowd to accept me. We had gone on many trips together to the town, and been swimming at the river. I had even gone to a wedding feast almost immediately, as his 'cousin.' Wedding feasts were closely restricted to the blood.)

"Manuel, himself, was your friend, too," Anastasio said. "He's a little younger than I am, and he can still talk. He should be able to come to you, now—especially since Luciano is dead."

He had been killed fighting with the Requetes in Tetuan de las Victorias, outside Madrid, where there had been no victory.

"Manuel should come to you," Anastasio had said, then, "or you should stop him one day when there are no snifflers about here, and you can talk." Snifflers were the special police.

"Do this, hombre!" Anastasio had said. He had gotten up to go, now. "Do this! Anastasio, who is an old fool, tells you to do this."

When he had gone, I sat in the dark there and tried to think of Luciano. He came back to me out of that time, very clearly and calmly, but I could feel no memory. Luciano was dead! I was remembering him then very truly, but nothing could move in me. I could feel no hurt, nor even begin to have that tightness in the throat that should come when the dead come back coldly and clearly to you. I must be dead, too, I thought then. We know each other? We have become used to each other. I am dead!—Christ! Look how we move so easily and quietly in the same world! Without conscious feeling! It isn't self-pity or exaggeration any more about my being done and gone. My body's dead, and there with him—with them, all of them. Only the mind stays clear, as the mind stays clear when you're drunk, and watches you be stupid and uninhibited. You have a great pain in the body or a foul stomach, and the mind stays cold and watches the pain from afar, trying to keep astride it, listening even to music while it is there.

Sometimes, in the day, when the sun was very bright and I was in it, the things that had happened in New York did not seem very terrible. They were not hysterical then to me. It was as if I would rise again. There would be a moment of feeling clear and healthful, soon, as if, when a headache is going there were little stabs of no pain, but then the deadness would always return, and always in a more sodden form, as when the pain in the head comes back with a still greater tightness. I had let go again, and I went down, down, deeper. The things of New York went away—soon, I would stop feeling the things in Spain.

The night that Anastasio spoke to me, I could not sleep. I was tired, but I could not rest, and I lay awake and let sleep stay far away. Then, in the next days, I watched Manuel very closely whenever we came together, but he did not seem to be different. I watched him, and I waited a little as if I could hope. And then, on a late afternoon, only four days after this night, Manuel came down the road into the pueblo from the fields and stopped at our gate. "Hello, Kito!" he said.

"Ola, Don Manuel!" I said.

He stood by the gate with his short hoe slung over his shoulder and looked at me. I almost wanted to turn around to see if there was someone standing quietly in the doorway whom he was really looking at and getting ready to talk to, but then he saw the look on my face and said, "Have you got something to do, now, niño?"

"No. I haven't! Not now! I was just sitting here, Don Manuel," I said. I pushed forward a little on the bench, awkwardly.

"Can you come over to my house for a minute, then? I have something to show you."

I stood up. "All right," I said, "Don Manuel. What is it?"

"I will show it to you," he said. He was very serious. "Come!"

He waited at the gate for me, and we walked down into the pueblo together, and then along the single street to his house. Manuel did not say anything during all the way down. When we went into the front yard through the great double doors, he closed them behind us and sprang the lock. Then he put the hoe against the side wall and winked at me quietly. "One minute, Kito" he said and went into the stable.

He came out right away, carrying something that he was unwrapping out of an old red sweater. He flipped the last part of the sweater off and handed the thing over to me. I saw that it was the side of a broken box-crate, the small heavy side, and that it had some crude printing in pencil on it. I was holding it, and looking at it and seeing that it was printing in English, when Manuel said suddenly, "What has it written there?"

"Eh?" I said. I was trying to read the printing.

"It's written in English, no?" Manuel said.

"Yes," I said.

"What does it say there?"

It said:

HERE LIES SOL
MARKOWITZ, THE
FIGHTING JEW, N. Y. CITY,
DIED IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY,
THE EBRO, SEPT., 1938.

The letters were crudely and hurriedly made, and in pencil. "Where did you get it, Don Manuel?" I said.

"In the Prado! In my bean-field, there. On the right side of the path toward the Abadia. What does it say?"

"There's someone buried there, Don Manuel. It says that."

"A Marxist?"

"One who was fighting with the Government, yes."

"Communist, Kito? Eh?"

"Hombre, Manuel! You don't know that! You know damned full well that all of them are not Communists."

"Yes," Manuel said. "All right! I understand. I remember, now." He looked down at the board in my hands and scratched his head. He worked his fingers under the beret. "Coño!" he said. "Coño!"

"Did you see the body, Manuel?" I said. "Did you actually find him?"

"No! No, hombre. I just hit that with the scraper. It was only a couple of feet under the earth. And the wash almost brought it out into the air. I scraped it when I was going along close to the road."

"It's in your field, though!"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, mine! The field in the Prado, by your Uncle Bernabe's bean-field. I never go so close to the road, but I have to raise more things to live by, now. You know that? We all have to do this."

"I know it," I said. "I know that all right." I tightened my fingers on the board.

"Is he English?" Manuel said.

"He was an American," I said.

"Like you then—English, eh?" In Spain anyone who speaks English is an Ingles, an Englishman.

"Yes, Don Manuel," I said. "He came from my city."

"New York?" he said. "Is that true? Truly?"

"Truly!"

"Coño! Coño!" Manuel said. "That is something! That surely is something! The same city! Coño!" He had a soft, kind man's face, and whenever he became surprised and interested like this the eyes and face became alive and bright.

"The same city. Yes," I said. "It is something. It is truly something, Don Manuel!"

When I had been living there, in New York City, in our city, now, ours and Sol Markowitz's, and trying to be a writer, the writer that I wanted more than life to be, I used to wake up every morning there, feeling all discouraged and afraid. I would go around the room getting up the breakfast, moving slowly with that cold feeling of the morning all there with me, and trying and hoping to catch the feeling of being normal and living again. I would be waiting and hoping to make the move that would start me up again and bring back the feeling of living, the living; some little thing like opening the coffee can and having the strong healthy smell hit my face, or holding the clean, bright dishes and getting the table well set-up; such little things as these that could make you begin even to plan where to go today, with what stories, and to what editors—whom?—could make you begin to hope healthily for some good mail.

I knew that feeling surely, how it came slowly but steadily, and the quickening of the body that it brought, and I was beginning to have it now, to feel it again, again after that long morning of being dead and drained. How long? How long was that morning? It seemed to be coming from the board that I was feeling excitedly now with my fingers.

She would be; she used to be sleeping in . . . (not yet! No, not yet. Not about her, yet, fellow!) I shook my head a little. Manuel was looking at me. I said suddenly, "Manuel, do me a favor!"

He opened his eyes very wide. It must be showing in my face, I thought, and I was using the friendly 'Manuel,' now, and not the formal 'Don.'

"A favor, Kito?"

"Let him stay there, Manuel! Let him rest there for now! We can go out there some night and fix it up for him. And don't tell anyone this!"

"Hombre," Manuel said, "I . . ."

"Go ahead, Manuel! Please go ahead and do it. I'm with you! I'll do something fine for you after this," I said. I could not think of anything fine that I might do then, but it did not matter.

"Hombre," Manuel said again, "I . . . You see, I can't, niño. It will . . . I would like—I almost wish that I hadn't found it, now. Truly! He could be resting easily, then. But it will spoil the field! I know that it will spoil the field. I have to move him away, Kito. I have four fields and five children."

"Yes."

"It's bread, that field! It's bread to me!"

"I know," I said. "I understand. I understand, Manuel!" I pressed my fingers into the board. I could not lose this thing, now! Manuel was watching me. All the brightness had gone out of his face.

"We could move him," he said slowly, then. "We two!"

"Move him? Heh?"

"Take him up and carry him over to the rico's field. Bury him there!" The *rico* was Don Rafael Gonzalez, who lived in Madrid and Paris—Paris, now—and owned many fields in this province. He did not cultivate them, now.

"It's right across the path from there," Manuel said. "He can rest in that field. He could have plenty of time to grow into the earth then."

"But what about Don Rafael?"

"He's away. He's gone from here."

"He might be coming back, now. Soon!" I said. (There won't be any danger soon.)

"That's right. You're right," Manuel said. "He may be coming back, now. And he would raise hell, then. If he finds him in that field, he is capable of throwing him out on the road. He has no heart, that one!"

"He would do that, too."

"He would," Manuel said. "He would throw him out like waste."

I felt along the edge of the board with my thumb. It was still sharp enough to be new.

"How did this soldier get there, Manuel?" I said. "How could he be there?" I could not remember that they had ever come so near. Have I been so dead, I was thinking, then.

"Oh, that's far from here," Manuel said. "That place is very far from here. It's up by your uncle Bernabe's bean-field. You know—right there where the Prado path turns down from the old Abadia."

"Off the path to Lesme's house? There?"

"There! I heard Lesme one day tell of how they were there. After the big retreat down from the Ebro. Some of them got lost and went down off the highway."

"They were lost?"

"They were off the highway, Kito, and tried to turn back and go across."

"Oh!" I said. "Oh, I see." Lost! They had been lost then, too. I put the board up to my mouth without thinking and began to bite into the wood.

"We could bury him here," Manuel said. He said it very quietly.

"Here?"

"In our cemetery! That's what the cemetery serves for, no?"

"Yes," I said.

"We could say that he was known to you—in your city—almost that he was a friend," Manuel said. He was talking very simply and calmly, now, solving this problem for us in a reasonable, practical way, and I listened to him plan it, carefully, even, and calmly, with an able, honest man's true native knowing, but I could feel no hope for his way; even though it seemed so certain to him who must know these things.

He stopped talking, then, and I was thinking about it all and trying to get it so that I would think of something to say, now, that would keep it going, when the knocker on the outside door rapped suddenly.

Manuel gave a little jump. He looked at the door, and then down at the board in my hands quickly. The knocker clapped twice in fast succession as if the one outside was very angry. Manuel put his hand softly on my arm. "Who?" he said out loud.

"Who is it going to be? Open! Open, tonto!"

"Micaela?" Manuel said.

"Micaela! Mica*eal*a!" Micaela's voice said from outside in a mock accent. Her voice was high and angered.

Manuel patted my shoulder. "Tonight. Tonight, I'll see you," he said in a whisper. I went to open my mouth to say, "I—" but he shook his head quickly and put his fingers to his lips. Tonight, his mouth said. He slipped the board out of my hands and started to wrap it again in the sweater as he hopped and ran into the stable with an old man's quickness. He came out right away (Has he thrown it somewhere, I thought suddenly with fright), and then went running to open the door.

Micaela and her youngest daughter came into the yard with their farm tools slung across their shoulders. Micaela was too tired to yell at Manuel. She did not say anything. Then, when she saw me, she tried to pick up a little. She smiled. "What does Mickey say?" she said.

"That this is a hard life!" I said.

She laughed suddenly and bitterly. I smiled at her to cover it up. "Until later!" I said to them all, then. I wanted to go. "Adios!" Micaela and Manuel said together. Dolores, the daughter, did not say anything.

Out in the street, I went thinking: She *can* laugh. Sure! I mean it. She truly has a right to! Some hard life this is for me all right. Sit all day in a cool spot—on your ass—and look sad. You're an invalid! Something quite terrible happened to you a long time ago, and you're nursing it along, now.

I began to hope that it had not been a very bitter laugh. I hoped that Micaela did not really hate me or dislike me. It seemed very important, now. She might feel better toward me after she has rested.

I ate quickly at home and talked to the family when they spoke to me. When I let my aunt fill my plate again, they all looked at me very quickly. Then, after dinner, I went into my room. I put on my sweater and went downstairs to the yard, and began to wait for Manuel.

I waited quietly at first, sitting on the bench by the tavern door, but then, after a while, when he did not come, I got up and walked in the yard.

He had not come yet, even when the night had come surely with its darkness. I started to worry very much. I went out to the road and walked down it a little, but I did not see him. When I came back into the yard, my aunt was standing in the doorway. She came out to me.

"Are you well, Kito?" she said.

"I'm all right. Sure! I'm all right, tia," I said.

"You're acting very strangely tonight."

"You mean because I ate a lot," I said. I laughed.

"No, hombre. No! I'm very glad about that. But you seem excited by something. Is he bothering you again?"

"Who, Fausto? No! Oh, no. Nothing of that. It's all right," I said. "It's all right, Aunt. No one's bothering me. I'm all right. I'm fine."

"You're getting better, then, maybe, eh?"

"Who knows?" I said. I laughed a little again. She was smiling a bright, happy smile at me. She was my father's sister and she loved me very much. I could be getting better.

"Come to bed soon, Kito," Aunt Felipa said to me. She held her face up to me and I kissed her on both cheeks. "I'll be in before Uncle Benito locks the door," I said. "Rest well, tia!" I was sure that Manuel would come before that. I watched her walk over to the door and then go inside with her white hair showing bright suddenly in the light.

He would come suddenly in the darkness. He would come quickly. Only to tell me of a plan! And then go.

I waited in the yard. Soon I felt the cold. I began to feel that loneliness, too, that comes in the night when you are up and alone and everyone around has gone quietly to bed and sleep. The dogs were huddled together under the woodshed. I could not make out their eyes shining. They were asleep, too.

I felt the cold on my skin. Only my stomach felt warm with the food in it. The cold went all along my skin and pushed the body out from the warm stomach. I'm getting sick, I'm getting sick, I thought. My stomach became warm and then, suddenly, cold. That means puking—it was too much to eat, suddenly like that. Cold sweat came out on my forehead, very cold sweat. I lifted my face up to the air. I shoved my hands down hard into my back pockets. The air felt cool and soothing. "Sol Markowitz!" I said. I'll remember that! Let me remember him! Help me! I breathed deeply with my face held up. "Sol Markowitz!"

And then, it was all right! I began to feel quiet. I waited a little, then. Manuel did not come. I felt very calm and quiet. A little while longer, I hoped. Only a little while! But he did not come! I went upstairs to bed. My uncle was due very soon.

I lay awake in the bed with my eyes opened out to the darkness, and let the voices come. First, the voice of my mother: this one was clear and sounding. I had started making my ears and mind hear her voice on the first trip to Spain. That had been on the boat, on the first night out. I had been lonely and crying, feeling a little sick. I lay in the bunk near sleep and let her voice call from nearer and nearer to me, until it was almost in my ears from outside the curtain. To call me from sleep! Keep me awake!—I was afraid to sleep.

Now, on this trip, she had been dead five years, but I was lonely and dying, too, and I could call her quietly and near. That voice had become more clear in Spain, now, than on the ship that night outside New York.

She called me, "Mickey! Mickey!" with the sound true, and the growing irritation, and the face behind it. All true, now! "Mickey! Mickey!"

Then, Myra's voice. Myra's! It came clearly and low tonight, not striking and full of the fear that was always behind it for me, and that said, "Turn me off!" Always, "Turn me off, or I'll tell you what she's doing! I'll tell you where she is now. With whom! With whom!"

I only heard her call, "Mickey! Mickey!" quietly, clearly—as in the days and nights before the wedding and the quarrels that came after that. "Mickey! Mickey!"

The two voices came clearly, tonight. The voices in the city—voices from the city that had been far, far away, with a high wall between! They came clearly, clearly, clearly, now. Sol Markowitz had come out from there! The wall had been broken? Sol Markowitz! Sol Markowitz! I tried to make that voice come. It would call, "Varona! Varona!" I made it say, "Varona! Varona!" in the way the men at school had said it. The accent would lift a little. "Varona! Varona!" It said it slowly, slowly, unclearly; until sleep came.

In the morning it pulled me slowly out to waking. "Varona! Varona!" I listened to it calmly as if a dream. "Señor Varona!" it said. It said it loudly and strongly. Suddenly, this was a loud strong voice that could not have been the voice of a New York City kid dead in a strange country, because this accent was strong and true, and he would not say, "Señor." That was 'correct.' My dreams were fooling me again.

"Varona!" the voice said loudly and with a laugh, and I opened my eyes to be fully awake. It was morning and very light. I heard the voice saying, then, "Varona! Señor Aristocrato! Mickito Varona!" and it was coming from right outside the door. It was a voice that I knew.

I jumped up from the bed and opened the door, and Manuel was standing outside with my aunt laughing beside him. I smiled at them. I could feel myself beginning to blush. "Hombres!" I said.

"I was just coming in," my aunt said. "Manuel has been waiting!"

"Eh?" I said.

"I was telling your aunt of how you spoke to me before of going up to see the old Moor's castle," Manuel said very quickly. "I'm working up that way, now. You could come with me. I'm working in my bean-field. You know, the one right by your uncle's bean-field."

"Oh, yes!" I said. My face felt suddenly red. "Yes." I could not keep the admiration I felt for him out of my voice. "Yes, surely, Manuel!" I said again. I could see my aunt smiling very broadly. She was happy to think that I was beginning to get in with people here again.

"Surely, I'll go!" I said. "I'll go, surely! Thanks very much, Manuel!" I leaned over to give my aunt a quick kiss, and then I went back to dress. "In a quick minute, I'll be all ready," I yelled out.

When we were on our way there to the fields, Manuel did not say anything of what we were going to do until we had made the turn on the highway and we were on the road that went toward La Quintana. I remembered that the bean-fields were on this road.

Manuel had shovels and a short-handled hoe on the cart. I tried to think of what the Spanish name for the hoe was, but I could not recall it. Some burlap sacks covered the spoons of the shovels. Tools that were not farming tools might invite inspection and then danger. We had not passed any Moors or special police, or even the old Guards, on the road thus far, but I felt glad that Manuel had covered the shovel spoons.

"My wife caught me last night," Manuel said after we had gone a way.

"Yes, Manuel?"

"I was getting ready to come over to your place, and she got interested."

"Oh," I said.

"She began to ask some questions."

"About me?"

"Oh, no! Not about you, Kito! No! About me. Just about why I was getting so free with my time and my movements lately."

"Oh! Ya!"

"So I decided myself to do it this way. This is the better way."

I said, "Yes, this *is* the better way." I tried to say it hopefully and with confidence. I did not know yet what way he meant, or what this was. "This is the best way," I said again.

Then, when we got to the bean-field, I could not remember it. "It's changed," Manuel said. "You can forget the war, sometimes." Yes, you can, I thought. That's true. Yes!

I was looking around excitedly. Where was it? Where was the place here? Where could it be? I was still standing on the cart, and looking from there.

"You don't have to look far, Kito," Manuel said. "It's right here." He had pulled the oxen off the road and a little on to the field at the right, and now he pointed down to the side. He was watching me with his face a little anxious. I got down off the cart and went to the back to take off the shovels. Manuel was standing by the oxen and patting their flanks.

"It's right here," he said. He pointed down.

"Right here?" I said. I was beginning to feel my knees tremble, and my eyes seemed misting. "Shall we dig?" I said. I passed the other shovel to Manuel. I passed it awkwardly. I did not know what plan he had. Shall we dig? Shall I dig?

He took the shovel without saying anything. He nodded his head a little to me. Then he looked up and down the road and over to each side. "We'll just act very naturally," he said, "as if this is an ordinary thing that we are doing."

Manuel told me about where to dig, and we started. The ground was cold and hard but we clipped at it with the edges of the shovels and it came off in solid pieces. Then, after the first level, the earth was softer, and we worked better and were going down. When we were about three feet down, I began to smell a smell that I had never smelled before, but a smell that I hoped quickly in my heart as soon as it came I would never smell again.

My knee had been trembling quietly all of this time, and now it began to shake visibly. I leaned on it hard as I swung out with the dirt, but it shook in the soft earth. I was trying to keep this terror out of my face. I kept it turned to the side and away, even then, but Manuel saw the knee shaking. He stopped shoveling, and looked at my face. I looked at him and he nodded his head to me. "Ya!" he said. "Ya!" In Spanish this means all that "I understand" can only imply in our language. Both of my knees were shaking visibly. "I'll be over by there, Manuel," I said. "Call me." He nodded. "All right, boy," he said.

I went over to the side of the field. I wanted to keep near to the hole, but I tried to get beyond the smell and I forgot this. I sat down with my back to the hole, and closed my eyes and let my head down on to my arms. I pressed on to my knees to keep them steady. I listened to the sound of Manuel's shoveling.

When I had been very sick and warm with fever and my mother would come to me with a cooling drink in a tall, clean glass and she would hold her palm to my forehead as I drank, I would begin to love her all over then. In my heart I would promise to be wonderful to her when I was well again. To be so fine to her! Now, I felt all this again toward Manuel. I thought of what fine things I could do to help him. How could I pay him back for this? How could I make him glad that he had done it? Pay him way over and beyond it?

Then, suddenly, after this short time only, the shoveling stopped. I got up right away and walked back to the hole. Manuel was standing inside at one end. I breathed naturally and tried not to feel the smell when I looked down. The figure of a man encased in a brown canvas was lying neatly uncovered at the bottom with the sides around it all cleared of earth.

This was it! Here it was, then! When I looked at the body, now, the smell seemed to go away. I could only *see* the body. It was Sol Markowitz. Dead Sol Markowitz!

I looked at Manuel. He was red and sweating. He held his shovel up to me and I jumped forward and grabbed it and lifted it out. I bent down to help him, but he held his hands up. "No, no, boy! That's all right," he said. "Come on!" He motioned to me.

I stepped down quickly into the grave and reached my hands under the figure at this end. I bent down. The smell hit me suddenly again, consciously, and the knees began to tense. I pressed on them. "Don't tremble! Don't bawl!" I hoped.

Manuel was holding the other end and we lifted it up and out. It stuck a little to the earth at first, and I was surprised when it came out, how stiff and light it was. The canvas seemed to be undamaged, but stone-hard. "We'll put it on the cart," Manuel said.

"All right," I said.

We laid it lengthwise at the cart's side. I'll feel this later! I would feel this later, I knew.

"All right, now, niño," Manuel said. "Here we go!" He grabbed up a shovel and began to fill the hole. I picked up my shovel and went at this end of it. I shoveled hard. That would make up a little for the shame of before. Anyway, we had started! We had found him already! I did not know Manuel's whole idea, yet, about now, but we were started.

We finished very quickly. Five minutes, it seemed only—less! We smoothed the dirt over the surface, and then clapped it up a little with the hoe so that it would look as if it were scraped. I counted that it had not taken fifteen minutes for the whole work.

Manuel took our shovels and the hoe and made a triangle on the cart floor with the body as one side. Then he covered it all very carefully with the sacks. It looked like a scraper, now, being taken home from the field with a covering for the rain that could come at any time in this season.

We started to go very quickly. I sat tight on the seat. The plan? The plan, now, I hoped. Our oxen were clip-clopping along the smooth path, the irons on their hooves making a small, clicking sound. Then, suddenly, Manuel let them slow into a walk. He seemed quiet and relaxed. He had been looking back into the wagon many times and then all around to see if anyone strange might be out here. Now, he seemed quiet and assured, again. Now, I was thinking, right now!

"You couldn't have known this one, could you?" Manuel said.

"The soldier? This soldier?" I said.

"Yes, this one."

"Oh, no! No. I didn't know him, Manuel."

"That New York is a great city, eh? Very large? There are many people living there, no?"

"Seven millions, Manuel! More than in Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao all together. Before the war, of course," I said.

"Yes," said Manuel. "Of course! Yes!"

On the first visit, before, we had always talked of New York City. I had liked to boast, and they were very appreciative and receptive. Fine friends, good listeners! Now, none of them spoke of New York to me, or even when

I was near, because of what they thought had happened to me there, and they were kind. Big cities, too, were not a good topic in these days.

"But this one came from there, no?" Manuel said, now. He could not let go of this strange thing.

"Yes, he came from there. He came from New York."

"Poor young one!" Manuel said.

"I don't know, Manuel. He found himself a solution."

"A solution? Eh? How? How do you say that?"

"He did one thing that he wanted to do. He died doing it, but that put an end to all his problems and controversies, anyway. And he had solved one! He was true to one. He saw it out!"

"Si, hombre, si!" Manuel said. "Yes! Sure! But you have to live! One must stay alive to go on! You have to see the end of it. The end of everything! Don't listen to these tired farmers around here. All that talk about death and rest has no sense—not even to them!"

"I don't listen," I said. I can't, now.

"Don't! Don't do it! Don't listen to them. Live!" Manuel said very strongly. "I had a boy that I wanted more than anything else to live after me. But he's dead, now, and in this when I think on it all, the only feeling I can have about him is to hope that he wasn't thrown into a field like this one. I hope Luciano's got a cross on him, and that he's among his own. That's all!"

Luciano was Manuel's son, who had been killed at Tetuan.

"I hope that, too, Manuel!" I said sincerely. This one in the back, then, was not among his own.

"I hope that we can fix it for this one," Manuel said then.

"Eh?" I opened my mouth to say, "What? Que?" I could not understand. He had seemed to have pushed 'this one' far back, just then, but now he came up with this sudden hope. I meant to say, "Yes! Surely! We can! We will!" but we had been turning the bend in the road and the pueblo showed now, big and near, and this seemed empty and unimportant to say, now: understood.

Manuel saw the pueblo. It had seemed very short coming back.

"They'll be asking us about him," he said.

"Yes, what do you want to tell them?"

"You tell them," Manuel said. "I know that you can do it, Kito."

"I?" I said. "I . . . All right! All right. I'll tell them!" Tell them what?

All during this time, since the moment that I had known what the crude name-plate meant, I had been very afraid of this moment. I thought, in the beginning, that I was afraid of finding the actual body of Sol Markowitz, and, before that, of how to get out there to it, but this minute had been behind all the fears: When I should come with Sol Markowitz to the pueblo and say, "Here he is! Look, he's here! What shall we do, now?"

The pueblo had seemed suddenly in mind to be crowded with people who could dislike me justly, because I had been nothing to them for these two years. We had been only as individuals, met suddenly and by accident, when I would be walking out alone or hiding in the house and they would come suddenly on to the path, or into the tavern.

They might have their chance, now. I had been thinking always of myself. I had never wondered how they might truly feel. It might be hate that was felt—hate, that would come out now. This fear was there suddenly and strongly. There was another fear that could come very strongly, but one that stayed far back for now. I did not even think of it.

I looked at the pueblo on the highway. It was quiet and serene and alone with one person only in it, someone who was walking along the street, down and out of sight. It seemed calm and quiet and clear with the sun on it, the way it had always looked to me in the far days, before the war had come and I had been very, very happy on my first visit to Spain.

"We could take him into our yard," I said to Manuel. Our yard stretched back into the pueblo and there were unused pieces of it that nobody would go into on ordinary days. "I'll do something about the dogs," I said. I could almost feel the fear beginning to move away.

"Good," Manuel said. "Careful with them!"

"Let's go around by the far side," I said to him. That way we did not touch the road, and went around our house by the side and back. No one was in the tavern and I did not see my aunt outside.

What I did about the dogs was just to chain them. As soon as they had seen us come in and pushed their snouts out toward the cart, smelling, they had straightened up suddenly and begun to whimper as if they were setting to bark.

I went up to them quietly, and petted them as I slipped the chains around their necks. "Quiet. Quiet," I kept saying softly to them. "Still. Still."

I saw Manuel lift off the cover and I got over to the cart as he was lifting out the shovels. "Are we going to put him on the ground, Manuel?" I said. The smell was there again. It was always there suddenly when you came back.

"On the ground?"

"Don't you think we ought to lay him on something?"

Manuel was in the cart.

"No, we can't, hombre! Not that!" he said. "We can't do that. If we put him on something, they'll see him from the road. Then, they may come in to look more closely."

"Oh," I said. "That's right. I see. You're right!" I wouldn't think of that. It was too practical and good.

We laid the body on the ground in a space between two cut logs. Then, we moved them in close. They seemed to protect the body, not to hide it. Manuel turned the oxen about to face the road again. He came around to the side of the cart where the step was. He stood watching me.

I began to thank him stupidly: "I have to thank you with all my soul, my friend! Even though this thing may turn out badly—for me, I mean." I laughed a little—to try to make it less stupid.

He raised his hands up suddenly. This was his gesture of kind impatience. "We're both in this," Manuel said. "We're both in, niño, and it will come out right. You know well that it will!"

But the plan, I was thinking. Where is our plan? It can come out right, then. I knew, of course, that there was no 'plan.' My friend, Manuel, looked up to me. I was young. I was a city man, with a college degree, a sense of the world's knowledge. I knew how to do these things. I could handle a matter like this—without trouble. He was looking to me, now. It was only just and fair that it should be like this.

"You can do this thing," he said, as if he had been watching my mind work. "You will do it, Kito."

What is it, Manuel, though? I had to think. What 'thing' is really to be done? What? "Yes," I said out loud. "Oh, yes! Surely! We will do it. I will truly do it."

Then, when we were shaking hands, I gripped his hand very hard. I would convince him of this! I would convince both of us! I patted his shoulder, and then gave him a lift up as he was getting into the cart. When he was on the seat and set, he looked at me and winked and grinned. I grinned back and waved my hand. I almost made it into a fist, but stopped suddenly. I don't think Manuel saw it. He was starting to go.

I watched him drive out toward the highway. I could still feel the excitement that had come when I knew I must do this alone. But Manuel was pulling it away a little, now. As soon as he was truly away, it would go quickly, I knew. I would be left alone with the body. I could join it with my own death, then. Get into a true quiet!

Before Manuel was away, though, I could begin. I could really begin this! Use this feeling—this pull of sudden excitement—snatch it and run it to a good quick use. I could begin to work 'this thing' out. To do this thing, as Manuel said.

How, though? What first? (Manuel had made the highway and was moving toward the bend into the back road.) The Mayor! The Mayor, of course! Go to the Mayor for permission to bury him in our cemetery! You could go to his house right now! Start it right away! (Manuel's cart had turned into the bend. The oxen were already hidden behind the trees.) Just go down into the pueblo through the yard, and all along the single street to the church and the clearing, and then across. The dogs will be quiet. (They were lying flat on their bellies with their snouts pointing toward the body.) You can pass them without stopping. Only look toward the body of Sol Markowitz and think, I'm beginning! Here I go, friend!

The streets of the pueblo will be quiet and deserted! The men have not come in from the fields yet, and the women are in the kitchens getting ready the noonday meal, with the children playing near them outside in the patios.

But that's all right! That's all right for me! It's fine. (I'm too excited to talk to anyone, now. I want to be their friend, again. I want to know them —I must start later, though. As soon as this is over! It will be fine, then.)

The Mayor, now! (His name was Bifanio Garcia. He was an old friend of my father's. They had been to school together, my father had proudly told me when I had come back from the first trip.) Bifanio will be at home sure. His fields are near to Mozares and he'll be at the house by now. (He was in the yard. I saw him through the open door as I went in.)

Now, you go straight up to him, and begin to speak, right away—before you have time and thought to become nervous and excited. (He was so surprised to have me come here and begin to talk to him like this, in this friendly, excited way, that he did not understand me at first.)

"A favor, Kito? A favor?" he said.

"I want you to give me permission to bury a friend in the cemetery."

"The cemetery? What cemetery, hombre?"

"Our cemetery, Bifanio! The cemetery here in Mozares."

"Oh," he said. "Ya! But—a friend of yours? I don't understand, niño. Er . . . what . . . ? Is it a relative here? Did something happen suddenly in the house?"

"No, no. It isn't that. It isn't like that," I said. "No one at the house. It is a friend of mine from outside. I have a friend who died here, and I would want him to be buried in our cemetery."

"Who is the friend, Kito?"

"It is a good friend of mine who died here! From outside!" I said. I was saying it quickly, and with a set confidence—trying to get some over to him —like the confidence I had wanted to get over when I said to my father, "I'm getting married, Pop!" I had no job, and was only a broke young writer, and I had been the last one in the family that they had expected to be married; absolutely the last one, they thought.

"The body has come here to us, now," I said to Bifanio.

"The body is here? In the pueblo?"

"Yes."

"Well, er . . . it's all right—that's all right to want! But, Mickito, why do you come to me?" Bifanio said. "The cemetery isn't 'municipal' any more." He laughed a little and blushed.

In 1933, the Republic had made all village cemeteries 'municipal.' Anyone of the village could be buried there. Before this time only Catholics had been laid to rest in the 'Holy Ground,' but since all the members of Mozares had been tacit Catholics, there was no trouble. When the Republic came to back them, some of the men in the pueblo had broken openly with the Church, and then some of these who had died later were buried in the now 'municipal' cemetery. This was only after great quarrels and great trouble, though.

The Mayor had secular control of the cemetery under Republican Law. He had opened the cemetery to these dissidents with hard doubts in his poor, worried mind. He had had to apologize much all around and to rationalize his actions in his own heart. I had written a story about it once, which had been very successful in New York.

We both thought of all this, now. "But you can still say who goes in," I said.

"Hombre, they haven't taken that right away from me, yet. But I always try to work in collaboration with Don Angel," Bifanio said. Don Angel was the priest of our district. He lived in a village ten miles from Mozares, in Villanueva.

"But Don Angel doesn't come until Sunday, Bifanio," I said. "This is Thursday. My friend should be buried now or tomorrow. By tomorrow, surely."

Bifanio's face was sliding back into the worried look of the old days. I think this was growing familiar. His memories were very strong with him. "Where is the body?" he said suddenly.

"At the house," I said. "At my aunt's house! Do you want to come to see it?"

He turned to look in at his kitchen while he thought over this. The worried look on his face was set. "I return in ten minutes, Pilar," he yelled in at the door, then.

"Who's out there?" Pilar, his wife's, voice came in answer.

"The Englishman!"

"Ola, Pilar!" I shouted in. "How are you doing?"

"Suffering as always!" Pilar said laughing. This was an old joke with us. Pilar was a patient, healthy woman, very happy in her life with Bifanio. Bifanio, too, was very much in love with her. They lacked only children to make it full.

"I wait for you," Pilar said after a moment.

"Goodbye," I said to her. "May you get well, quickly!"

"Thank you!" she laughed out. "Thank you very much! Equally!"

While we were crossing the clearing back, Bifanio tried to make conversation. He asked me for the latest news of my father. I told him about the last letter, keeping only to the minor points because I could see that he was not thinking about it. He had just been very polite.

"My old friend, Miguel!" he said to the ground. "Poor old Miguel!"

You're right, there, friend, I thought. I wondered about what my father was doing then, if he might be quiet and content for this moment, now—not worrying about the next installment due on some loan. Poor Pop!

We had reached the pueblo's street. We were beginning to walk up it. We went past Manuel's house, and then Pablo's, and David's. I was thinking of my father and the people at home, and then, suddenly, up ahead, a dog barked.

I stopped dead! The dog began to bark loudly, and then another dog came in. They screamed! I tried to listen for a minute, but I knew almost surely where they were, what dogs they were—they were ours! And straight up ahead you could hear the barking that was becoming only shrill and screaming, now. I started to run up the street. "Hombre!" Bifanio yelled in surprise. He started after me. "Hombre!"

I came up to the end of the street with the sound of the barking growing louder and more shrill. As soon as I had turned into the yard, I looked for the dogs. One of them had broken loose from the chain. The other was screaming and tugging. I knew that the free dog had made for the body. Knew it right away! Even before I had looked up quickly with this feeling of shock and seen my uncle standing by the body, holding back the screaming dog by the neck cord—before I had even run up to them and seen the canvas pushed away at this end of the body.

"What's happening here?" I think I said. My mouth didn't seem to work now. The running and the excitement of this were tightening in my neck and chest.

"What's happening?" my uncle yelled. "Yes! What is happening, eh? What have you got there? What in carajo is that?" He kept nodding his head to the body, and his knuckles showed white where he held on the straining cord.

"It's a body!"

"A body? A cadaver?" he almost screamed out. He cuffed the dog suddenly. "Me cago en diez! What do you mean? What can you mean? A body in here?"

"The body of a friend, tio!" I said. I tried to stop the gasps.

"What? What?" he yelled.

"A soldier! He was a soldier!" I said.

"And you bring him here? You bring him in here?" he yelled. His voice had reached a pitch of anger that it stayed on because it could not reach higher. "This is a patio, fool! A patio!" He pulled back the dog roughly and cuffed him again. I saw that he was trembling.

I opened my mouth to say something, but no words came. My upper lip started to shake. Bifanio came up, then. He took the cord from my uncle's hand and pulled the dog that was barking and jumping out, now, back to the shed. I kept watching my uncle. I tried to bite my lip down to keep it tight. Uncle Benito was standing in front of me with his two hands held out to me and trembling. The look in his eyes and face that had been of pure anger had changed, now, into the set look of something remembered.

"You knew him?" the set mouth hissed out. "You say you knew him?"

"I knew him," I said. "Yes, I knew him. I knew this one."

Bifanio had come back to us. My aunt was with him. She must have heard all this, I thought then. And the smell was here, now, too. I remembered it when I saw my aunt put her fingers suddenly up to her nose. It was all around then.

"So you knew him?" my uncle said again. He did not even notice the others. "You knew him? Where?" There was even a calmness in his voice, now. He knew where he was going.

"In New York," I said. "I knew him in New York. Where I lived before! He's from New York." That smell was all around us. The tightness was coming back into my chest, but I knew him! I had to know him! Sure!! Sure, I knew him! I knew him from—(Where? Where did I know him from? Where?—City College! City College, that was it! City College! Any sensitive Jewish kid from New York City who had the guts and the brains to come out and do this must have gone to City College. And I knew him there, all right! Sure!)

"New York?" my uncle said in the quiet anger. "New York, eh? Which wishes to say that he was a Marxist. Eh? He is a Marxist!"

He had thought of this then? This was the thing remembered.

"He fought with the Government," I said.

My aunt had been watching my face. When my uncle had said, "Marxist," she looked suddenly at him with a new fright. Then, she had looked back to me.

"Hombre," she said to me, now. "Don't look like that." (How did I look?) "He's very excited. He doesn't mean anything! Just excited!"

"Excited?" my uncle yelled at her. Where was the stage anger, now? "He brings the body of a Marxist into my yard. The body of a rotted Marxist that proclaims itself by its stink!—in this time when you cannot buy a pound of butter without being investigated!"

"But a little calmness, Benito, please!" Bifanio said. "Or the investigation will begin very soon."

"It won't! It won't begin yet!" Benito said to the side, without looking at Bifanio. "You brought him here?" he said to me.

"I had to bring him some place for now, my uncle!"

"You brought him here?"

"Yes," I said.

"Good," he said. "All right! I just want that clear. Now, I may report it."

"Vamos!" my aunt said. "Don't get yourself hysterical, Benito!" Bifanio was looking at him with his mouth a little open.

My uncle's small, cruel mouth had tightened into a thin, set line. "This is the way you pay me," he said, "eh? This is the way?"

"Benito," my aunt said. "Please! Please!"

"Amigo Benito—as a favor! Calmness!" Bifanio said. "We have to keep calm."

"I'll keep calm," Benito said. "I'm keeping calm! I have to be calm when I go to the authorities. I've kept safe for two years—two years!—even with a Communist in the house. I won't get into trouble, now."

"This is no trouble, Benito," my aunt said. Her voice was beginning to break a little with fear. "You won't get into trouble. Of course, not!"

"Of course, not!" Benito said. He looked at her. His voice was calm. "I don't intend to. Assure yourself of that. Assure yourselves of that," he said to all of us. Then, he turned very quietly and walked out toward the highway. Bifanio went after him, calling.

"Let him go," my aunt said to me. "He won't do anything," she said. She did not seem to believe this.

"No," I said. I looked down at the body. The dog had pulled the canvas back at this end, but you could not see anything.

My aunt reached out for my arm. "Is he your friend, truly?" she said. "Kito?"

"Yes, tia! Truly!"

"Where did you find his body?"

"In Manuel's bean-field."

"Oh! Ya!" she said. "I see it! But what do you want to do with him?"

"Bury him, hombre!"

"Bury him?"

"Yes. He deserves that, doesn't he?"

"Sure, niño! Of course," my aunt said. She tightened her hand on my arm. I looked at her and saw that her eyes were wet. I patted her cheek, but she shook her head against my hand.

"We have to do something right away, then. Now!" she said. "Now! Can we take him inside?"

"Inside?"

"We must take him away from here," my aunt said. All of this time the dogs were barking loudly. "Come!" she said. She gave me a little push and went over to the body. Then, she bent down at that end and lifted it up a little. I jumped to lift it at the other end. I could see the tears streaming down my aunt's face. "To the stable!" she said. "We can take it into there!" "Eh?" I said. I backed toward the side stable door, and we carried the body in through there. My aunt pushed easily along—to the end stall. "In here!" she said. The stall was empty. Some clean hay was piled to one side. We lay Sol Markowitz's body there. My aunt began to cover it with some loose hay.

"Don't do that," I said. She looked up at me. Her face was wet. "Come here, hombre!" I bent down to take her arm, and led her out of the stall. She let me hold her while I kissed her cheeks and her hair, awkwardly. I kept saying, "Don't cry! Please don't cry!" to her.

After a little while, she was quiet, and we went upstairs. We went into the kitchen and she sat down by the fireplace. "Are you all right, Baby?" I said. "Are you really all right, now?"

"Yes," she said. She kissed my hand. "Go into your room, loved one! Stay there, now."

"All right," I said. "I'll do that. All right!" I gave her a last kiss and went out into the hall. I went into my room and closed the door.

All right! All right! Everything is all right, now! You can feel all right, too! This thing is fixed! Relax and go! Let up and go! Sol's in his stable, and you're in your room! And all, all around you, they'll bind you in. No! This is no prison—this is your room! See it? Your room! Sol's in his stable, and you're in your room. Relax and go! Have your hysteria, too. Have your hysteria—nice, crazy hysteria! Get out of this thing! Keep it away from you! Let it stay fixed! Fixed, and now!

We'll build a prison around you. We'll build it tighter and tighter!

I sat on the bed and let this thing sing. (Have my hysteria, too?) It came down closer and closer, and rocked me near. Then, just before it closed me tight, I jumped up and was out. I opened the door and slipped out to the stairs. She heard me and came running from the kitchen. "Don't stop me, aunt! Please don't stop me, now," I said. "You go back and rest. Go back! Don't come after me." She looked at me, and then nodded her head silently. She stayed at the stairhead.

I went down to the hall and into the stable, and then shut the door tightly. Over at the last stall, I could see some of the new hay sticking out. I went over to it and looked at the body of Sol Markowitz there. Some tomb, Sol! Some tomb you got, eh? I said. It's clean, anyway, though, isn't it? It's clean, eh? I started to cry.

As soon as I started, it came strongly. I couldn't keep it down. It was coming all out right away. I tried to work my hands to stop it, but it would not let. I pulled up the sleeve of my shirt and felt the long scar across the vein on my arm. I pressed my fingers into it to get back that pain—(You're worse than a pimp, she had said to me then. Worse than a pimp! A pimp does some work, at least. You don't do a goddamned thing! Just sit here! Just sit here all day and fake!

(She had been very tired that morning. We quarreled every morning, but she had been truly tired of everything, this day. Getting ready to go to the job that she hated! I was supposed to be a writer. That was my work! I stayed at home and wrote.) I pressed my fingers deep into the scar.

(We had been married seven months, then. I had not sold a piece in the seven months, only published four stories in small and unimportant magazines! Just before we had married, I had been going fine—with two stories in the leading prize anthologies. People had read them and would talk to me about them.

(I had been living a very hard life, then. How stupid this seemed! The hard life and the good work! The life of ease and the no-work! I had been living with my family, with all my family, doing the work in the house for eleven people; having the privilege of taking time to write at home, and not going out to look for the job that wasn't there, anyway!

(She had rescued me! Myra took me out of all this hell! Myra had a good job. She seemed to make enough that would easily support us both. But then, as soon as we had been married for any time at all, we were quarreling. We quarreled about money, about why I didn't write, about why the apartment wasn't spick and span—the way it would have been if she were home all day and had the time to spare that I should have, because I wasn't writing anyway. Was I, darling? I wasn't doing any writing, it seemed, was I? No writing! No writing at all? Eh?

(That was it! Yes, no writing at all—I couldn't get going! I could not start! Everything was there, now—all the time I wanted, the ease, the comfort, the lady in bed; and the food and the smokes and the drinks when I needed them.) Almost unconsciously, I was running my fingers quietly along the scar.

(All that white, clean paper was neatly piled and ready, and the row of sharpened pencils at the side of it, but nothing would move one. There was nothing to make the brain go; nothing to feel, to write, to say, to tell! Hey, look! I have a story! Look—I feel this! Nothing of that, or like that! This was all cleaned of such things, too.

(I would grab at any feeling that felt true—write it out into a story—right there, then! Push into it, work it—it would go up to fourteen pages sometimes—before it died. They all died. They all died, cold. I would read back over it. I read it truly and coldly, even though I searched with all my hope for something real. It was never there!

(I put the piece away. The thing would grow with time! But then, in the morning, I would take it up again, looking for that life sign, my heart beating hard—choking in my throat, at the end, but always it was dead! There would even be decay there. I tore it up—tried again, right at that moment, so soon I'd use the choking and the anger, even, to give it life with.

(I would think it out coldly and calmly—why can't I get started on anything? Not something big or important—just a little thing, any little thing that was true! Any little thing that I could nurse for a week! Then, it would be all right! It would be tight and strong!

(I thought it all out, but it never came through. I could never find the way! I never found the way. No! It seemed to lead out from a good, blocked end—a blocking that spread across and seemed to cover other paths.

(We quarreled, now. We fought! One would walk out then, and come back hours later to find the other drunk or crying, and with a cut in each heart that would not heal soon. We lived, and just let the time between the quarrels grow shorter and shorter, and soon the one before was not forgotten when the new one came.) My fingers pressed deep and steadily into the scar.

(I was a faker, a pimp, a sucker! I had not the guts of a worm, even! Why didn't I fight back? Fight back!) Fight back? How? Why fight back? I could only fight back now, pressing my nails deep into that hurt.

(That was supposed to save it! Fighting back! Fight—get rid of that steam and the hurts! But no—you can't even make that effort, she said.

You couldn't! You *just* sit there and sponge. Sponge all the time! Sponge on someone all your damned life—on your father, on your aunt, on me! Sponge and slack! (I had taken a leave of absence from the Party—in order to give 'all my time' to my 'writing.' The thing had been very complete!) Sponge! Sponge! (And press, press at this sore!) Sponge until there's nothing left to sponge! Sponge until there's nothing left to suck at! Then, you'll crawl into a corner and die! You'll even do that! That's the way you'll finish it—take all the suckings with you! All the spongings!

(But I didn't! Oh, I didn't! I tried to—not to take the suckings and the spongings with me—just to end it like that, but I was no good there, too. I only cut the vein across my forearm because I had closed my eyes suddenly as I swung the blade down. She was standing at the door, ready to run out this time, and she jumped and came back, and screamed and slapped me across my face again and again as I was pushing the blade in.

(It had been so stupid! So damned, damned stupid! All of the terror and frights were there, and the finality, but it could only be stupid! I woke up on the floor, pulled in by the dull sting on my arm. The house was there. Nothing was changed in the house. It was all there. The only new thing was a coat of clotted blood over the sting in my arm. When I walked that sting went up into a throb; then, only a pain. I put a coat over it and went out—to look for some place. To look for a clinic! The doctor didn't believe my story about an accident. I had been cutting a string; holding it along that arm. I tried to demonstrate it for him. "All right," he said. "All right! It's none of my business," but he kept looking at me in that funny way.

(They were all looking at me like that, as if my clothes were on wrong, or as if I were drooling—as if I were not hurt, I kept thinking.

(I couldn't go home. I did not want to go back to the house, and my aunt and my father were away. I went to stay with Mike, our organizer. He made me lie down on a cot. Rest now, he kept saying. And forget it! Forget it and rest—looking at me in the same strange way.

(In the morning, he said: I want to talk to you. I've been wanting to talk to you for a long time. Mickey, you have to grow up! This is a hard time! We're all having a tough time of it. We all have to fight to keep our heads up—especially we people. You've got responsibilities, now—to your wife, to yourself, to the people. Maybe you ought to give up the idea of writing, Mike said. Maybe, you ought to get back. . . .

(Get back? Get back? I told him to get back! Mike, you get back. Get away! Get away, will you please? They didn't understand. They can't understand, I thought. That's what the look comes from. I have to get away! I have to get away from them all!

(I went to the street! I rode the subway far; and then went into a theater to sit in the warm darkness. . . . My arm was riding high on a pain that yelled out for me.) I held my hand tightly around it, now, as if to keep the pain low. (When I came out of the theater, I tried to walk anywhere, but soon I was going to a place I knew.) Yes! (Soon, I had come to the place. Soon!—I was leaning against a wall, trying to have that pain lift me. A person was holding my hand and talking to me. I listened to the voice—I heard it! It was Steb's. My darling brother Steb's. Kind Steb! Kind Steb, who always knew! I pushed my eyes open and saw the look again! The look was there, too.

(The look was everywhere. It seemed to be the normal face of people which they showed to me. In the hospital, the ones who came to see me always had it there. It had become kinder, now—they would pat my shoulder or my hand—but it was still wondering in their eyes. Why? Couldn't they understand? I was a writer! From the very beginning, I had been a writer! Didn't they remember—from the very beginning! I want to write!

(How simple that is! How easy, how simple, my friends! Don't you see?

(Then, on the pier, when I was taking the boat to Spain, where I was going to be 'all right' again, everyone who came to see me off had that in their eyes. I wanted to run away and be into pain again. Myra did not come to say goodbye. She had never come to see me. They had wanted her to stay away.

(I always thought of her with the look, though. With the look strong on her face! Myra! Even Myra! Are you my darling, Myra, who came so close?—You can't work at home, you're not happy, there. We'll get married, and you can write in our house!—Myra! You went to bed in the beginning with the first published stories under your lone pillow. That was knowing it, then, darling. How did you forget it?

(How did they all forget? So quickly, too? I could not understand until I had forgotten myself. Until I had forgotten what it was—even simply! How did it feel to write a thing? How did it feel to have that moving? Where was that hysteria, now, that could push the pen and the brains? Where was all that feeling gone—all that anger even, and the disgust that had no hope in it? All fallen away? In two years? It had been so easy, and such a clean, smooth death! Thanks for that!

(And where could they be, now? So I could tell them how I understood! I understand! Yes! Yes, I know the look! It's all right! It's all right, now! I'm up with you! I was up to them, now. We could go past together! Myra!

(Where was she, now? Two years and three thousand miles away! All,

all away.) Holding tight to the arm, now, could not bring her any nearer. The pain was all gone. (She had gone very far. My Myra! In the city she must be moving around—as if there had never been anything, then, to make her cry; to make her wonder.

(Sol Markowitz was dead. But he was closer to her! Sure! Those two had a thing. I had been born to be a writer, but she had not been born to work in that rotten hell of an office, and he, this Sol, here now, had not been born to be this stinking soldier's body in a Spanish stable. That was the difference! That had been the difference. Surely! That was it! He was closer to her—close to her!—closer to all of them.

(He had a good, live, tight year nearer, closer! Sol Markowitz! Sol Markowitz, friend! How was her world I had run away from? Full of pain? No! It couldn't be. This was the world of pain. Far away from that one! All of the pain was here. We kept it full and brimming with our weakness whenever it went low. Just like now!) I rubbed the sore, but did not hurt it. I did not need the pain, any more, to do that.

It was just that I had given up too much in one time. My weakness was bare, then. They knew of it all. Now, they could tell it all. That look had been just. They knew—oh look! listen, if I could only cry a little and lose some of that new quiet that had come after all this letting out! The weakness would not be so bare and alone, then. I could have some of that feeling of drained death back in me to cover the other up a little. I could lose this soon—I knew that I would lose all that emptiness and that 'death' —but that could be after this quiet had become strong then and I was . . . I was. . . . I did not want to think of that, now . . . when I was well? Well?

Then, suddenly, very, very suddenly, while I was leaning there, (I had let myself down against the stall-post), and while I waited for the tears that had even lost their meaning, Guards came to our door! I jumped up straight—then almost fell back from the weakness that was physically real. Then I heard my aunt come running down to talk to them. As she passed in the hall she pulled this door to the stable tighter.

I heard her talk to them. They were Santos and Pedro, the Guards who had belonged to the town before the war. Yes, I heard her say. Surely! This rumor they had heard was correct. We had found something this morning. "My nephew found it. He was out with Manuel," Aunt Felipa said. It was an old stone plate from the Moorish castle. "The old Moor's castle, you know!" Manuel had helped Kito cart it home.

An old thing, my aunt was saying quickly. An old stone plate—not even complete; broken! (Where did she get her guts? I wondered. I even forgot that the story was clever.) She couldn't see the value of it, she said. Not herself! It had no use—but, they knew how it must be. People of literature do strange things very often. Did they see?

They did! Santos and Pedro had been old friends of the family. They could forget these new laws sometimes. Then, too, my uncle, who was her husband, was the second greatest landowner of the district. So that they might see this thing easily enough. They said their 'goodbyes' then, and went away again. (Not for long, I thought. If they know! That might just be the first visit. They would send Santos and Pedro, the most unoffensive to see, first. Then they will all come!)

My aunt must have watched them go. She stayed at the doorway for a long while. Then she went out into the yard and came around here, and stood a little away from the open stable door outside. I could see her moving around there, seeming to be very interested in the chickens but always keeping in the line of the door.

I was watching her and thinking—what a wonderful, fine old girl she is! (The things of just before the Guards had been pushed back.) when, in the front, suddenly, a bunch of men talking loudly, came into the tavern! I heard them, and then my aunt heard them. (The Guards? So soon?) I moved out and went up to the door. Outside, Aunt Felipa had started around the corner of the house. I listened at the door and could hear the voices plainly, and then, suddenly I knew them. Of course! Yes!

Someone had come out into the hall from the tavern. They yelled, "Mickey! Kito!" up the stairs. I opened the door. It was Bifanio. "Hombre, Bifanio!" I said. "Hello!" He jumped a little. Then he saw me and smiled all the way. "Hombre!" he said. I had to laugh, I felt so glad suddenly.

I could see Manuel and Anastasio in the tavern, and then my uncle and Fausto. "We want to talk to you, Kito," Bifanio said.

"All right!" I said. I went after him into the tavern. My aunt had come in, and was smiling and very red. It was good to see the relief that she felt, now.

The older men had sat down. My uncle Benito was sitting on the bench near the window. His face still had the tight look. I was trying to hold my glad face. Bifanio saw me looking at my uncle.

"We didn't go to the authorities," he said. (It had been a rumor, then.) "The authorities of today are not like our usual authorities," Bifanio said.

I grinned. Manuel smiled at us. (Nazi secret police are not the *usual* authorities in any place.)

Then, Bifanio was looking around to see that everyone was set. He turned to me. "You say, now, Kito, that this soldier is a friend to you?"

"The Marxist," Fausto said. He grinned.

"Soldier, I said!" Bifanio said to him. "I'm talking here, Fausto. With your permission, of course!" "Please," he said to me.

"Yes, this man was a friend of mine," I said.

"You knew him?"

"I knew him," I lied.

"You knew him in New York. In your country! He was a friend of yours in New York, no?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then, on this basis, you want him buried in our cemetery?"

"Yes," I said, "on that basis!" Just the one lie, I thought. I can build up truth on that.

"Pardon me," Fausto said suddenly. "Pardon me for this interruption, Señor Mayor. I would like to ask, er . . . Kito, here, a question. May I?"

Bifanio had been ready to speak again. Now, he turned to look at Fausto. All of the annoyance he felt was in his face.

"After all, Bifanio!" Fausto said. "We're not letting our dinners wait for nothing."

"No," Bifanio said. He did not want to be unjust. "All right! A question?"

"Better!" Fausto said. He turned to look at me. "A bet! I'm going to make a bet with you, Kito."

I did not say anything. Come!

"I'll bet you that this one is a Jew!" Fausto said.

When this would come had been the second thing I feared.

"You're correct, Fausto," I said. "He was a Jew."

"See?" he shouted gleefully. He stood up and made an open gesture with his hands. "All of these Marxists are Jews. We knew that! The bad thing is that many of us don't consider the information from the State as carefully as we should." He looked around the room. No face challenged him. This was a new great thing to them.

"Do you expect us to let a Jew be buried in our cemetery?" Fausto said to me.

"I do," I said.

My uncle jumped up. "Caramba!" he said. "This is too much. This is too damned much." His voice was beginning to break already. "The boy has lost his reason! I apologize for him. Even if he is the son of one we love here!" He looked at me. "Do you ask us reasonably to be kind to a Jew? Can you ask us this?"

"I can," I said. "I do! Yes. I do! Don't you see? It's just because he is a Jew that I *can* ask you. I ask you to be kind to him. No one else is kind to a Jew! No one will ever be kind to this Jew. We must give him this favor!"

"Let him go back to New York!" Fausto said. "He'll get all his favors there."

"Will he, Fausto? Oh, will he? What in carajo do you think New York is, fool? The city where every Jew has what he wants there? Where every Jew is a millionaire and has three daughters who play the piano? (Where the agencies say: Sorry, we don't have applications for you here. No, I'm sorry! Young, tall Christians preferred—No goddamned Jews or kikes that they ask you to boycott in the little stickers on the stations, in the toilets, need apply.) The Jews are hated there, you know? The Jews are hated in New York! People are taught to hate them just as you do. People are made to beat them down!"

"And with reason!"

"With reason? With reason, tonto?" I asked him. "Because they want so much? Is that why? Eh? This guy wanted a lot! I know that surely, because I wanted it, too! I wanted it! (I wanted to hang around at college after classes. 'Stick around fellows! Enjoy this! Let's sit here in the alcoves, and talk, or we can go for a walk along Riverside Drive and then take the bus to the subway and ride on the top for a dime.

('This is the best time of our lives,' I used to say to them. 'We'll never live like this again.' No! 'Stick around!' But Moe had to get to his job at the shirt factory. His father's stationery store didn't bring in enough to keep the family going—much less to keep Moe in school. And Eddie had to go and usher at the Brooklyn Paramount. His father was a furrier. He worked only in seasons. Joe and Izzy worked in the Post Office at night. They would have to go to the library to do their assignments, now. No one of our guys could stay after classes, then, and sit in the alcoves and talk about things that college men talk about in books, or go out and walk and ride on the bus in the sun. Except me! They had to work.) "He had to work!" I said to all of them. "He had to work for everything he got. They gave him no easy favors. Listen to me and hear that! They didn't give us a thing!

"I'm almost glad that this has happened. I'm a little glad that this thing happened. Yes!—because, now, you will be able to see a 'different' Jew. This will give you the occasion to see a Jew who never had anything—not even a chance! ('I have to get all A's,' Izzy said. 'With my name and my schnozz, I'd easily be discriminated against, if I wasn't at the absolute top.') Who hasn't got anything, now! He's dead—and he hasn't got where to sleep! Things aren't 'given' to Jews."

"Why did he come here to make trouble?" Anastasio said.

"He didn't come here to make trouble, Anastasio! He came to help somebody. Something!" I said. "He came to help the Republic! He thought that was what the people in Spain really wanted. He knew how terrible this thing was that would come to them. Jews are made to know that before anybody else—the poor Jews! They suffer first from it. He just wanted to help them try to save themselves. So he came to fight with them. You do things like that if you have enough cojones and are willing to die. (And if you have enough problems that you can't solve, anyway! If you could never get into Med school in the first place—I'll make it!—Take temporary jobs, now. They broke off just when you were getting on! If there were no jobs at all—for years, no jobs! I started out to be a doctor, a lawyer—I tried to teach for a while, too! You can't get the job that will—you can't find the woman you want, or even if you do, you haven't got the money to marry her with and stay with her. You're a doctor that's a late Jew! You're a teacher on WPA! You might be a writer, but you can't write! Might as well toss it out in one sincere try!)

"He was interested in the world, Anastasio. He wasn't like us—we only worry about our little Mozares. (Wasn't Joe always saying that he'd like to go to Spain someday? Just to lie back in the sun—by the hours!—and stare up at that sky that all those poets in *Gruner's Second Spanish Anthology for College Students* wrote about. Then, eat, sleep, and drink! Only the wines, Joe explained. Just to give you that added rosiness! You could stay up at night and walk through the narrow streets in Toledo, Madrid or Granada, looking for interesting eyes in the lattices; listening for the tic-tac of castanets from some dim café. Ole!)

"He didn't come here to fight us," I said. "Not that! He wasn't sent here as an invader, either. He had to work his way here. You don't believe that? In the France that they want to tell us is an ally of the Marxists, he was probably arrested. They are doing that, you know. He . . ."

"Kito!" Fausto interrupted. Eh? "This is all very pretty—very fine! Maybe, it's all right, even!" He waved his hand as a concession. "I don't know! But, how can you expect us—how?—to give this Marxist a grave in our cemetery, when many boys of this, our pueblo—the sons of the men right in this room—are dead, and have been buried very far from here!"

"They're buried, Fausto! You can hope that they are buried well, too!" I said to him. "Now you ought to treat this one they way you would have desired them to be treated."

"And you ought to let the fathers of those boys speak for themselves, friend Fausto!" Manuel said quietly.

"I was just . . ." Fausto said.

"I know you were just . . ." Manuel said to him. "I know that!" He looked up at me. "Did you finish, Kito?"

"Eh?" I said. Finish? "I don't know, Manuel. This doesn't finish with me. Maybe Fausto sincerely feels for the boys he speaks of. I don't know! That's a good thing, though. And he can always console himself with the thought that they died for the race. Por la Raza! That was something that they knew very well and that they loved. When they died, they found themselves among members of the race who treated their souls like Christians. Not the way that Moors or Fascists do. Now Fausto can look on one here who hasn't even got a race. He came to fight for a people he did not know. The thing he knew was that they needed him. Only that! And the members of his own race denounce him, now, because he did this. The people of his religion deny him!

"All of you think that I am a Marxist. You think that I am a Communist, but you do not denounce me. You do not deny me! Because I am a Spaniard! Because I am of your blood—because I am a Varona, a Varona of Burgos!"

I could see my uncle staring at me. Why was he staring at me like that? Didn't you ever see tears on a man's face before, Uncle?

"I want to tell you all just this one more thing," I said, then. I looked around to see my aunt. She was standing by the door beside Bifanio. They were both very quiet and watching me. "This man is me!" I said. "This man is as much me as I can ever be. More, even! He's got my heart, because he's had my sufferings, and I know that he wanted everything that I wanted. (To write! To live!—with a job that you loved and could get respect for—writing, painting, serving, saving—). He had more courage than I had. He did some things for me, even, some things that I wanted to do, but that I was too yellow to do. (To face the thing of no-writing. To do a brave, fine act—that would get it back or kill me well!) He's gone beyond me (oh, not so far, please!), but he's all me, even then. And if I were dead here, no one of you would even want to suggest that I should not be buried in our cemetery of Mozares. Would you? You wouldn't, of course! You couldn't dare to think of that. No!

"Well, I want you to bury this boy for me—in my place! (And shall I take his?) As if he were me! I want you to do this. Please let me even demand it! Even if you do it, thinking that he was a crazy niño! With queer ideas—the way you think of me! Even if you can't understand, now, why he did the things he was doing. Even take him as an unusual Jew—a rare Jew that we can excuse ourselves for. That's all right! Just please take him!

"I'll explain his ideas to you. I'll stay here and tell you all about his ideas and his life, and why he did those things. Then, you can understand and be easy. I'll stay here for that! (And the other things!) Just give him a place to rest, now. Let him go to some place where he can stop being. And rest! Rest—that's all! That's all," I said.

They waited until night to tell me.

I stayed around near the stable all the rest of the day, and watched. Then, in the night, when the animals were howling and mooing, I took them down to the river quickly, to water them and keep them quiet.

Bifanio was waiting for me when I came back.

"It's all right," he said. "We're going to bury him in the cemetery."

"Yes!"

"We were going to do it tomorrow in the light, in the day, but they're very suspicious, now, in the town. They will come up sure, tomorrow!" Bifanio said. "We have to do it tonight, now. All right?"

"All right, Bifanio! Fine!"

"Manuel is here. He's going to help us! About Don Angel . . ."

"I'll speak to Don Angel, Bifanio," I said. "Don Angel is a friend of mine."

"I know, Kito, but . . ."

"I'll speak to him. Truly, Bifanio!" I said. "Don Angel and I will talk." All of us will talk here, now, I thought.

"All right," Bifanio said. "Good, then!"

Manuel was waiting inside the stable, standing at the head of the stall. He had the nameplate under his arm.

We carried the body along the dark, quiet street and into the little cemetery next to the church. Bifanio stood outside to watch, while Manuel and I dug a grave. The cemetery was four feet by twelve. The light from the kerosene torch lightened it like a small dark room.

After, we let Sol Markowitz down into the earth that all the Varonas were a part of. Manuel laid the plate upon the body. He touched my shoulder.

"Haven't they got something?" he said.

"Eh?" I said. "What?"

"Haven't they got something that they say? That we can say now? Their prayer?" He was down on one knee.

"I don't know. Manuel, I don't re—"

He patted my shoulder. "That's all right! We'll say ours!" he said. "We can say ours. Say ours!" He knelt down and began to recite the prayer for burial in Latin. In the pueblos, the men make up the choir for the priest and must know the ceremony in Latin. Bifanio was saying the prayer quietly outside.

"We entrust you into the hands of the Bridegroom," I said in English. It was all that I could remember from the prayer. "We entrust you to the earth, Sol Markowitz. The earth of Spain! You rest a while, now!"

NANCY WILSON ROSS

I, My Ancestor

The train pulled slowly out of the grimy underground passage, came into the open to move past the dingy windows of uptown New York with the glimpses of iron bedsteads, peeling walls, milk on the sills. It was raining and the whole scene was sodden and dispiriting. The train gathered speed. The masses of buildings broke up, became separate houses, became farms. Night fell and swallowed up the world outside the glass pane. In the morning it was Chicago. The same massings, the same grayness, grime, confinement. Lurch and sag of Negro houses, block after block, squat and shapeless like lumps of disease. Tin cans, old wood, old rubber, dirt and disorder and sudden cheap gaiety of crepe-paper flowers pinned to a brave lace curtain . . . *Tip-top Bread* . . . *Pure Dairy Products* . . . *De Luxe* . . . *Air Conditioning* . . . *You are Invited to Worship* . . . *Premium* . . . *Supreme* . . . *Stop-over*. . . . After he changed trains he was on a new model, built to cleave space horizontally, like a rocket. And again he watched the breaking of the city masses into isolated houses, into farms, into open country. . . . And at last there were the vast prairies of the Middlewest.

But it's all too fast, Paul protested. Between breakfast and dinner one has crossed the great plains where the bones of pioneers and their oxen lay bleaching long years in the sun, where the cholera epidemic wiped out hundreds of the western marchers, a threat more deadly than the Indians coming down on them riding the horses stolen from the Spaniards long before, painted Indians brandishing the tomahawks bartered from white traders who could hardly have guessed the uses to which they would be put.

The wheels turned in those days with a slow and grinding monotony, not with a swift electric click. The wheels turned, the wheels stuck, and women abandoned the chairs they had brought from home in which to rock their future babies. Loads had to be lightened. Old histories of Rome's decline lay in the dust of the American earth along the line of march but they kept the Bibles. Feather beds they kept also, for it was impossible to imagine a house without one, though when they reached the distant coast Indians would provide them with all the feathers they could wish, for two cups of molasses. But that was unknowable. All was unknowable, anything possible, everything probable to those moving westward through the Great American Desert in the Forties, the Fifties and the Sixties. On and on, plain and distant mountain, Land of the Shining Mountains and beyond it—how far no one could truly say—the land of mystery, the land of continuous woods and of the mighty River of the West with its source in the Mountain of Bright Stones.

Too bad it's over for all of us, Paul thought, his eye riding with the contours of the flying landscape. Life was simpler in those days because it was tougher and harder. It was direct and simple and solvable in physical terms, and the individual could still act upon it and shape it.

He found the experience of the long train trip infinitely soothing and restoring. For the first time in his adult life he felt conscious of the big reach of the country of his birth. A sense of expansion and power came over him when his eye stretched itself with almost godlike vision across the plains and valleys to the timbered foothills and the high shining peaks. His cramped city eye felt itself suddenly king as his cramped city body began to flow with the vastness and beauty of the countryside once the towns were left behind. Slow hills rounding up from the plains, mountains thrusting like spears behind the hills, rock and meadow, wind and cloud, horse and cattle, and timbered cabin intimately, briefly glimpsed beneath the junipers beside a rocky stream—these viewed so swiftly, so sharply, helped him to sleep at night with the kind of heavy relaxation that comes from actual exercise outdoors.

When he came back into the warmth and light of the club car from the cold observation platform, all his senses were abnormally sharpened by the experience of seeing night embrace the open land. Nothing seemed commonplace to him; not voices, not faces, not the dinner menu, the carnations on each table, the radio bringing to these isolated human beings in their glass and steel projectile the latest news of death and disaster—still remote, European, Asiatic—as they rocketed through the soft spring night. How was it, he wondered, that man so soon accustoms himself to the materialization of the wildest flights of fancy. Polaroid glass at the windows, satin-finish chromium in the rest rooms, dinner 'continental style,' two sections in each car designed for tall men, all of it guaranteed to assure the human being the utmost privacy and isolation. And in the midst of this appear the faces lonely and looking, alert for the ear and the eye to break momentarily the dark spell of solitude, to ease the apprehension, growing hourly more heavy, that they are soon to be caught without reprieve in a God-provoked fate.

This is 1940.

Sixty years ago, seventy, eighty, Nature had a power over space and time and man yielded himself at least in part to it, he thought, choosing the red wine and listening to a rumba from some distant dance orchestra which was filling the diner with its oily provocation. Between one coast and the other there were flies, dust, delay, inconvenience, discomfort, biting cold, festering heat, danger and death. Now there is a train like this with a little booklet, tastefully bound, to explain about the engine's low center of gravity making possible comfort at high speeds, the elevated cab with dual controls, the fog-penetrating headlights, long-range siren, and double-shatterproof plate glass. . . .

Waiting for his chops he lazily read the little book and, when he was joined by an immense woman whose corseted posterior extended itself formidably on either side of the inadequate chair, he decided to share the booklet with her.

"What," he asked her, "Is armour yellow? Do you know?"

She held a fragment of roll poised in her red-nailed hand halfway to her matching mouth. "What is *what?*"

"Armour yellow. It says here that the exterior of this train is painted on the sides and rounded nose, armour yellow—a color easily seen from a great distance."

"What an idea!" said the woman, adding a little more butter to the crisp surface of the roll and placing it firmly in her mouth. "In these times."

"What times?" he asked innocently, wanting to see what she would say.

She held the next bit of roll above the butterplate, tense with surprise. "The war, of course," she said.

She eyed him with suspicion. "The European war," she added, placing it. Not that little incident in Manchukuo but the special one England is engaged in. "Oh, that's right. Slipped my mind for a moment. Well, maybe they'll paint it all in harbor-mist gray now. That's what the top and bottom trim now is. Seems a shame when Mrs. Harriman worked it out so carefully—or maybe it was Holabird and Root. Maybe Armour yellow is a compliment to the Ham people. Maybe they get hams at a reduced rate. . . ."

The woman did not care for his talk, but she was glad of conversation, any conversation, seeing in it a stepping-stone to less taxing activity.

"Ever play gin rummy?"

"Not when I could avoid it," he said.

She looked aggrieved.

"Sorry," he added.

She said no more.

Later when they had returned to the club car she brought out a bag with knitting and sat in front of him working hard on something of a color too drab to be anything but military. He took it as a subtle reproach for his remarks at table.

He sat up late reading, and finally only one man was left with him, who, when forced at last to relinquish the radio because of mountain static, took note of Paul.

"Reading history?"

Paul admitted it, turning the book so that the man could see the title more plainly.

"On the Northwest?"

Paul nodded.

"Great country," said the man. "Great future. Know it at all?"

"I was born there," Paul said. He was glad to say it, anticipating the light that would come up in the man's face. "But I went away when I was just a kid. This is my first trip back."

"Yeah, that so?" The man was delighted. "Well, you'll see a lot of changes all right. I'm a great reader of history myself. Have a good library of Northwest books. Buy everyone that comes out. . . . What part you reading about now?"

"The railroads," Paul said. "The Chinese laborers."

The man shook his head. "I remember those Chinamen." His voice suggested that the memory was far from agreeable. "Stuck around out there after their job was done. Couldn't get rid of them. Brought in all their relatives. Got to be a regular scandal. Live on three cents a day, you know. Eat nothing but rice. Low standard of living. People finally got enough of it and rid the country of them."

"Yes," Paul said. "I know." I should tell him what I think, I suppose, but what's the use. He'll outargue me.

The Orientals moved through the untamed western landscape, wearing their faces like old leaves from a book of ancient culture, a tired culture, crying their anguished work chants. *Union Pacific.* They made a ballet of it and exiled Russian dancers, who had once been Imperial, performed it before big city audiences in America. I never saw the railroad laborers but I did see the ballet and I remember the Chinamen in Athena. Down the streets with laundry and vegetables, lending color to a drab western town with their faded blue coolie suits, wide straw hats and baskets on poles, their little running walk on small-boned bare feet. On holidays their cries of shrill and birdlike joy as they ran with a kitestring held tight in their yellow claws, watching the disks of colored paper burn magically on a washed blue sky. Only a short time for this, and then the Chinaman was a Dangerous Alien. Riots began then, burnings and murders, sudden attacks in the night and the little yellow men must run on their noiseless feet through the dark streets, seeking hideouts.

But this was later, after people had ceased to dance spontaneously and before they had become audiences for ballets. In the early days in the Far West dancing was the safest outlet for expansive forces when settlers came together after months of solitude, when white men venturing far beyond the confines of 'civilization' had only Indian women with whom to mate. Men danced together then unashamed. Dancing Trappers. Dancing Miners. Wise leaders like Lewis and Clark used dancing as therapy, taking with them a fiddler for their two-year trip, so that when the spirits of the men flagged as the weary days of hardship stretched both ways from them, they were ordered to dance, and dance they did. Clark brought his Negro, York, from Virginia, and York clogged solo for the men and for the friendly Shoshones—and there's an American ballet if you like! The simple thudding earthbeat of the Indian, the soft yet sharp timing of the clog, the sweet, winding measures of the reel. . . .

All this belongs to the past, Paul thought, forgetting the man beside him who wanted to talk, but it is a past very near in point of time. It is a past we can only envy, having seemingly lost our way. We look back and sigh at the thought of people crowding hot-eyed, strong-armed, single-purposed toward a future. Envy we feel for the steady folk who came westward planning homes. We even envy the restless folk, the dreamers and adventurers who came just for the trip. Envy fills our heart remembering that hopeful human tide pouring out of the Old World into the New. Land, cried the immigrants, breaking in waves on the eastern shore, sending the scattered foam of their influx through the valleys, the roads and passes, as far as the Rockies and eventually beyond. How much land for a dollar and a quarter an acre, cried the dispossessed, the land-hungry, pouring in from Europe. How much land they cried anxiously in the Fifties, and the United States Land Office made reply: 'There are fourteen hundred million acres of unsold land in this country, rich in agricultural capacity or mineral treasures.'

He looked up from the page to which he had returned, measuring this statement, wondering, What's that land they're going to irrigate with the Grand Coulee dam? Wish I had those figures.

"Know the figures on the Grand Coulee," he asked the man who had gone back to the newspaper from boredom. "I mean, how many acres of land it's going to irrigate."

"Too damned many," said the man. "We've got too many people out there now. Need 'em in this emergency but won't want 'em when it's over. The whole Middlewest's been pouring in there for the last six years. Couldn't making a living where they were. Always looking for the end of the rainbow. Seems to be in the Pacific Northwest now. I'm in the transportation business myself." He pulled out a card, handed it to Paul. *Zephyr Coaches. Ride on Air*. Hot or cold, take your choice. . . . The man had twisted half around in his chair, anxious to talk, eager, bored, "And from my experience I can tell you . . ."

For a moment Paul lost the thread of his remarks, studying the man's large-pored slack face with the tension lines running down between his eyebrows into his gold-rimmed glasses. When he had picked up the thread again the man was well into his subject.

"Yes, the Northwest's got a big future, all right, if we can just keep it in hand. Shipyards and Boeings absorbing a lot of the transients now, of course. But it's still some job to do it. Trouble is, these new people aren't like the old-timers out there. That's a fact. My folks were pioneers. My grandmother was a wonderful old lady. Crossed the plains as a girl. Kept the family diary. Lived to be ninety-five and had all her faculties up to the last. And boy, she had some yarns to tell. One I'll always remember is about how some folks she knew got over a pass in the Cascades. No trail. Not a darned thing to guide them. Had to kill oxen to make ropes to get down the mountains. Let the wagons down the canyon sides with the ropes, d'ya see? Well sir, one woman went on ahead with a baby in her arms, born on the way out, and leading a two-year-old by the hand. Can you imagine that? Two kids under three and walking with them both. Well, this woman ran into an old trapper up in those mountains and he just about died when he saw her 'Christ Almighty, woman,' he said—of course Grandma Barnes never told it that way but I'll bet my hat that's what he said— 'Christ Almighty, woman, where'd you come from? There ain't a blade of grass for fifty miles. You'd better git back where you come from.' And right there Grandma 'd always stop and we'd all get quiet, and she'd ask, 'And what do you think that woman said,' and we'd say, 'Dunno, Grandma, what did she?' And Grandma'd say as proud as if she'd done it herself, 'Why she said, We can't go back! We've got to go ahead'—and she marched right past him with the baby in her arms. Yessir, great old woman, Grandma Barnes."

And what is this? Tears in the eyes, a film across the glasses of the president of Zephyr Coaches? But: "Too much riffraff coming in! Don't want any outsiders, don't need 'em! We worked hard to make this country what it is and we don't want it spoiled." . . . Spoiled? And the morning eye, peering from the windows of the lower berth, sees the vast ugly stretch of a lumber burn, and beside the road in an alder thicket a man stands shaving with a little hand-mirror hung on a tree. Only a few miles walk into town. Maybe even if you're lucky a ride as far as the first place where men line up for jobs.

Stick to the past, Paul thought. It's not so controversial. Yes, my family were pioneers too, and, yes, I'm proud of it, I guess. Anyway I know I am when I read about it. It makes good reading, that's a fact, stories of those people who settled up the valleys of the Pacific Northwest, clearing land, founding grist and sawmills, building log houses with puncheon floors, cat-and-clay chimneys and glass brought round the Horn. Indians, uninvited, pushed open the cabin doors of gentle women from Illinois and Maine to squat in their blankets beside the hearths and watch the mysteries of white cookery. Indians in the peaceful Sound country speared salmon by the roaring rivers and strung their nets on the gentle waters of Whulge. Indians in dugouts glided by on the waters which reflected Kulshan, the White Watcher and the Mountain that was God, singing in minor, striking the canoe sides with their paddles in rhythm as they sang. Here French fathers, homesick for the Ile de France and the music of their native tongue, established missions, planted vines, and cultivated roses and grapes while teaching the Flatheads the chants of the Church.

Whole sections of the western country remained free of the sickness for gold, and wherever this happened there arose a society that was truly democratic, one in which for a brief time opportunities were the same for all and each man shared what he had with his fellows—from thumbed volumes of old books to seed potatoes and children's cribs. But wherever the earth gleamed with the fatal light of gold, life developed after another pattern. Towns sprang up between dawns, towns of muslin-walled houses where shadows loomed big in the firelight and in the light from rude oil wicks. Bullets went true and unimpeded through these muslin walls and only beds were protected by sacks of flour and sand. Where men hunted gold there were few to plant potatoes and fewer to read the books brought from the Old Country or the states to the East. But dancing there was sure to be, 'eight and ten gallon' dances, with bands of favored 'German ladies' at a dollar a dance, and rougher women than these walking out on the trails in men's clothes, carrying pistols to make sure the price offered was acceptable.

Where the Big Trees were found there was no gold, but in time it became clear that the big trees themselves were only another form of it. Land was needed which the Indians considered theirs and treaties had to be made with them. Rumors like dark poison began to circulate among the peaceful tribes; rumors of deportation far to the North to the Land of Eternal Darkness. Fish and Horse Indians who had lived for centuries a free and patriarchal existence, hunting, horse-racing, spearing salmon, story-telling, singing, dancing, saw their way of life being slowly undermined. No longer allowed to roam at will they must live on reservations. Then the 'massacres' and a shudder ran through the scattered whites. Then the Indian Wars. . . . The old pattern: peace, violence, peace again, violence again, the eternal repetition.

"I suppose there are Indians left," he said to the president of the Zephyr Coach Company who was again trying the radio.

"Oh, sure," said the man. "A no-good lot. Just siwashes. See 'em if you go outside the towns, or even around the towns on the Fourth of July. I guess there are more of 'em in the eastern part of the state. They use 'em in the Ellensburg Rodeo and the Pendleton Round-up. Easterners like it—and the kids. Something kind of romantic at that about those big head-dresses and those white tents they put up on the Fair grounds."

Something in the man's speech, his tone, laid a faint edge of depression on Paul's anticipation. Maybe I've been harboring some romantic dream myself, he thought, about this country of my birth. Maybe even I've let it be fed lately with such symbols of man's creative power as the Grand Coulee Dam seems to me to be. Maybe I've been inflated a little by thinking, 'Puny man did that: rolled a mighty river over on its side and back again; froze the canyon walls to stop landslides; forced the stream to yield astronomical amounts of electric energy. . . . Am I really hoping to see something out there that will restore my faith in life and man?' His thoughts troubled him and the last night of the trip he lay awake listening to the roar of the train and distrusting the impulse that had brought him on this long journey.

BETTY BAUR

American Gothic

The village of Bath, on the New England coast, is at the very tip of a long curving point of land at the mouth of the Bath River. On one side lies the Atlantic, icy and treacherous. On the other is the harbor. There are two small islands guarding the mouth, and at the extremest tip of Bath there is a lighthouse, on naked rock. Haverford, an industrial city, lies inland, twenty miles up the river.

The village was first settled by pirates, who operated before the Revolution. When they dropped piracy they settled down to a safe smugglers' trade of rum and Negroes, with the Ivory Coast, Boston and the West Indies as pivot points. The old, permanent families of Bath are directly descended from these early settlers, as their names indicate. One leading family, now headed by an old woman of nearly eighty with a grandniece and no male descendants, is called Alvarez. But as long as anyone can remember the family has been thoroughly Yankee, and the name is pronounced Alvarey, to rhyme with Avery. In the same way there is the Guillaume family, pronounced locally Gillum and spelled that way by one branch.

At the beginning of this century Bath became a fashionable colony where wealthy families, mostly from Boston and Haverford, but also from as far south as New Haven, had summer homes. These they erected along the clifflike hill directly facing the sea. They were enormous frame houses, painted white and trimmed blue or green. They had huge double-decker verandas, one to a floor. The steep sandy slope that fell away from them to the shingle beach was terraced, and roses, calendulas, flocks and hollyhocks grew there, although somewhat pale and dry, as though burned by too close contact with the astringency of the ocean and salty winds. It was in this period too, that the Bath Yacht Club, known as a "millionaire's Yacht Club," was erected. It was spacious, fashionable and had entries in all the regattas, not only here, but in England.

War in 1914, and the automobile, changed Bath. The automobile made it easy for the "riff-raff" of Haverford to enjoy the beaches. The summer colony fled from people who came for the day wearing their bathing suits under coats, or worse still, who changed their clothes in their cars, behind newspaper-draped windows. In the words of the real-estate operators, "a cheap crowd" took over.

But "cheap crowd" or fashionable, the old Bath inhabitants, the Alvarez, the Guillaumes, the Braces and the Ketchums—there were about fifty families in all—remained living in the houses they had built themselves at the beginning of the village boom, in the Eighties and Nineties. A number of families had been reduced to remnants, windows, maiden aunts and rheumatic old men, but they all had small incomes from property that had been theirs for generations, or had been sold at fancy prices.

The summer of 1943 found Bath in the middle of a new phase. The "cheap crowd" had dried up, even as gas to run their cars had dried up. Their shacks on the harbor side stood locked and silent, the paint fading. There was only one tiny store open in the entire village, a place where without enthusiasm they sold bread, newspapers and ice-cream cones with sherbet in them instead of ice cream. On the side of Bath facing the ocean, the great houses had boarded windows and were deserted, as they had been for some years. The sea wind moaned along their immense sagging verandas and flicked off the last peeling streaks of paint. The wood of their beams and pillars was as dessicated and smooth as bleaching bones. Over the grand entrance to the former millionaire's yacht club was a splintering sign: Private Property. No Trespassing.

In this generally somber community, certain individuals found one bright spot. This was the poker games in the house of Miss Alvarez, the head of the Alvarez family, well in her seventies, and known as Sissy Alvarez.

Sissy was small, and her back so bent as to be almost a deformity. She had a startling abundance of yellow-white hair and snapping, crackling dark eyes, testifying to her continued vitality. She powdered her face to a dead chalky white and wore lipstick of a shade known as Torch Red. She had not been outside of Bath in fifteen years, nor to Haverford in twenty. But she was great at telling jokes and was nearly always in a cackling good humor, except for her murderous rages and occasional lapses into black melancholy.

She was so old that everyone had forgotten her past; they had forgotten that she had never married. Sissy herself had forgotten nothing. She still hated her sister, dead for thirty years, with the relentlessness with which she had hated her when she was alive. She often directed her imprecations at the sky, where it seemed to her the dead Mary was sitting, unseen, but with her ears open. She hated her because Mary had married the man she herself had determined to marry. That was in 1890.

One evening in early August of this second summer of the war, Sissy Alvarez sat on the porch of her huge and crazy old house overlooking the sea and waited for her cronies who came twice a week to play poker. Her knotty hands were idle but she had an occupation all the same. She was looking with intensity and malice at her sister Mary's granddaughter, her own grand-niece, playing with the kitten. The child's name was Mary, too, and she had the other Mary's finely drawn, lifted eye brows, giving her an expression of timid anxiety. It was not that little Mary had done anything. But the hot thundery weather set Sissy's teeth on edge, and she remembered old wrongs. Her beady eyes fastened on the child, sitting on the patch of sandy grass. She was only fourteen, but a well developed girl. She would be costing Sissy more money with every passing year, and of all the tricks fate had played on her, to be charged with the upbringing of Mary's granddaughter was the worst. Sissy swore under her breath.

Sheet lightning flared up the eastern sky over the ocean. For an instant the islands at the mouth of the harbor emerged from the twilight, the spiny outlines of their rocks laid naked. It was a hot, still night.

Sissy, who had been humming under her breath, as usual, a tuneless drone now frantic in its buzz, suddenly broke off.

"Where did you get that red wool?"

Mary's back was turned but she shuddered all over. She turned to her great aunt, her little face apprehensive.

"You gave it to me, Auntie."

"I didn't give it to you."

The child fingered the red wool halter she had made for her kitten. The kitten was a downy little object, white and sand colored, and now Mary clutched it spasmodically against her breast. She could feel the mischievous creature stirring under her hand and looking down was comforted to see it batting with its forepaws at a button on her dress.

She took courage. "But you did Auntie. Don't you remember? You gave me that old scarf with all the moth holes in it, and I unraveled it."

Sissy's snapping eyes regarded the child. Her memory was not what it had been. But she must never, never let anyone know that. She grunted, by her grunt signifying that she remembered. She sat back in her rocking chair and continued her droning song. She thought furiously, trying to remember the red scarf. At last she remembered. Good. She would not want to find herself guilty of having bought wool for Mary.

A figure approached up the road, walking slowly because the hill was steep to Sissy Alvarez' house, which stood alone on the top. Sissy hummed louder. Her eyesight was excellent. It was almost dark but that was obviously Charlie. She would know the droop of his shoulders anywhere. Charlie was one of her standbys, of which there were three. Sometimes there were as many as six at her poker games, especially on Saturday nights, but always there was Charlie Cass, Tom Bixby and Orman Featherstone. And they were coming tonight. It was a good thing, because she felt very irritable and she didn't like the lightning that kept flashing over the sea. There was going to be a storm.

The three men who came regularly to her house were very different. Charlie Cass, the one approaching up the road, who always arrived first, was the "cousin" of the Widow Grace and had shared with her, since her husband died, a house down in the village. He was a mild, pale man with greying hair and a flabby mouth. He had no visible occupation, although it was said he was writing a book, a collection of tales and legends about the New England coast. He was supposed to have attended Harvard, back in the early years of the century.

Then there was Tom Bixby. He was a conductor on a branch railway that connected the adjoining town with Haverford. He was small, dry and florid and liked to wear flowers in his buttonhole, preferably roses.

And then there was Orman Featherstone. Of the three he had the most distinguished past. He had been a Haverford lawyer, quite successful. But that was thirty years ago, and he had ruined himself with drink. When people wondered why he had wrecked such a promising career, old Sissy Alvarez would wink and say, "Did you know his wife?" Nobody nowadays had. She had been dead for many years. His wife, the descendant of one of the most glittering families in New England intellectual life, in a flurry of vague dissatisfactions had embraced the teachings of some outlandish religious cult. Perhaps she had been attracted by its exotic exponent, a little dark man with compelling eyes, from Istanbul. He had told her she had been an Egyptian princess in a former incarnation. Unfortunately her husband had discovered her in the midst of certain dark rites. At this interesting point in her story Sissy Alvarez was always prepared to give details, probably imaginary, but few of her hearers, looking into the madly blinking eyes of the old woman, encouraged her to go on.

Featherstone still drank fantastic quantities, though the quality of what he drank had gone down, and he had long since forgotten the reason he had sought consolation from bottles. At one period, in fact for years after his wife's death—for she had died of scarlet fever not long after her husband's discovery of her religious activities—he had avoided women and could hardly bring himself even to talk to the maiden lady who was post mistress at the village post office. But this had been succeeded by a lubricity that had increased with age, so that he was now referred to by the Widow Grace, whose sharp eyes had noted his behavior when young girls were present, as "that old goat."

Charlie Cass turned up the driveway that came around in front of the house in a wide semi-circle. He wore, as usual, his panama hat. He was a reserved kind of man and Sissy knew that he would show no sign of awareness that she was on the porch until he got to the steps of the house. Her eyes snapping, the tuneless hum buzzing madly, she ironically watched him pause and look out toward the sea.

Charlie took off his hat and mopped his brow. He came up toward the house, carrying the hat in his hand.

Miss Alvarez could stand his deliberation no longer.

"Hello, Charlie!" she sang out suddenly.

Charlie looked up as though genuinely startled. "Good evening, Sissy," he said politely. "Very warm tonight."

"Don't pretend you didn't see me," Miss Alvarez cackled.

Charlie smiled vaguely and stopped beside little Mary.

"Hello, Mary. That's a new kitten isn't it? I haven't seen that one before." His voice was gentle.

The girl's face was raised trustfully to his. He was the only one of her Aunt's friends whom she liked.

"Is it going to storm?" Suddenly the old woman was in a fine humor. She had just caught sight of Featherstone and Bixby coming over the brow of the hill. They would have a good game tonight and she would recoup her losses. She had lost ten dollars on Wednesday. It infuriated her. But tonight, she suddenly felt, was her lucky night. It was the beginning of the month, wasn't it? Ah. She remembered. It was the fifth of August, and long ago the gypsy woman had told her five was her lucky number. Sissy Alvarez grinned secretly.

Orman Featherstone and Tom Bixby were also in a good humor. Orman because he had been drinking off and on since breakfast and Tom Bixby because he too was convinced that tonight was his lucky night and that he would recoup his losses, which, however, were substantially less than Sissy's, a mere five dollars.

Orman Featherstone was singing as he and Bixby approached. He did not remember where he had got the song but it was a relic of his student youth and his year at Oxford.

"In Plymouth town there lived a maid, and she was mistress of her trade I'll go no more a ro . . . o . . . ving with you fair maid!" He spread out the syllables in a long drawn jocosity and clapped little Bixby over the shoulders.

Sissy regarded Featherstone with satisfaction. He wouldn't have all his wits about him tonight, she calculated triumphantly. She well knew the signs, the exaggerated flush of his heavy face, the disorder of his clothes. She would get that ten dollars back and more.

Little Mary, still cradling her kitten, got up to go indoors. She knew the signs too. "It'll be noisy tonight," she was thinking. Every once in a while it was noisy when Featherstone, Charlie and Bixby came. Then, long after she had gone to bed, she would hear them singing, and sometimes the piano jangling and her great-aunt's high laughter. Sometimes there were wild quarrels, and then her aunt shrieked and cursed until Mary thought God must surely hear her and do something about it.

Mary edged up the steps of the house, trying not to be noticed.

"Don't go away, Mary," said Featherstone. "I've hardly seen you all summer." Then he turned to Sissy, "What a fine great girl she's getting to be." His voice had still a suggestion of deepness and power that had made him his reputation as a courtroom lawyer. Though a little roughened now, it was the voice of a cultivated man.

He chucked Mary under the chin and when she drew back, blushing hotly, he gripped her small, round arm and drew her to him. His watery blood-shot eyes went over her, as though he were seeing her for the first time. They noted her fine skin, her full red mouth now quivering piteously—because of all her aunt's friends she disliked Featherstone the most—her young breasts bursting out of a dress too childish for her, with a pleated front.

"A very pretty little thing," he murmured, his face quite close to the shrinking girl's, his hand kneading her arm.

"Oh come, Orman, leave the kid alone," Charlie Cass' thin voice complained. "Can't you see she doesn't like you pawing her. Besides, you're drunk."

Featherstone dropped the girl's arm and looked with quick indignation at Charlie. "I'm not drunk."

Still mumbling and protesting he was pulled by the others into the house. Sissy was anxious to get down to business.

Outside, violet light bathed the rough grass and the apple-tree, the blank, deserted houses of the rich people, the sea plucking at the shore. Mary held her kitten up under her chin. She buried her nose in the ruff of its neck. "Oh, kitty, kitty," she moaned, and the tears trickled onto the kitten. The sky seemed to open from end to end, torn by a spectacular flash. There was no thunder. The silence was oppressively unnatural. The kitten mewed and Mary stared with fear at the sea, broken into white points. "They're coming up from the bottom . . . all the terrible sea people," she whispered. The lighthouse stood out white as a skeleton. The kitten was agitated. "It's only summer lightning, kitty." Scattered drops fell on her; the rain was warm, whipped from over the hot mainland. Mary gathered her kitten to her and ran to the house.

Inside the poker players had hardly settled to the table and dealt the cards when a wild gust of air made the old-fashioned lace curtains stand out straight. Heavy with dampness and the salty smell of the sea, its wild breath scattered everything before it. The cards went up in a great fan and fell everywhere, under the sofa, in the empty fireplace, wedged under the door. A small lamp was turned over when the shade was caught like a sail. It was a single gust, and then the curtains dropped and simply hung there, limply.

"I told you we'd have a storm," Charlie Cass said as he bent to pick up the cards.

Sissy was furious. This was a bad omen. She had been dealt a very fine hand. A pair of queens and a pair of jacks. They always played straight poker, as Charlie couldn't stand any of the varieties, even five-card stud. That hand of hers under the circumstances was certainly a winning hand. It was a very bad sign. She cursed aloud as she retrieved the cards that were easy to reach and ordered Bixby, who was the most agile of the three men, to get those that were in difficult places.

"It's started to rain!" Charlie said triumphantly.

The scattered drops were coming faster.

Sissy cursed again. Featherstone, in a speculative mood, had once wondered aloud to Charlie where she had picked up her swear words. They were so graphic, brutal and laughably indecent, coming from an old lady of respectable family. It was one of the things that gave her company such piquancy.

Sissy shuffled from window to window closing them and mumbling, "It's that wind, drat it!" Suddenly she went to the doorway and shrieked upstairs, "Mary, come down here you worthless girl and shut these windows. Here I am an old woman—" she broke off, tired of that well-worn routine and contented herself with a parting, "And shut everything upstairs too!"

They heard the girl answering faintly, and quick steps above in the uncarpeted hall.

"It's a big house for you two," Bixby suddenly said, as though the thought had just struck him. He looked around the living room thoughtfully. He wouldn't have wanted to live in this museum, though it was a good place to get away from his wife. The living room was large and it was crowded with furniture, of which the most prominent piece was a huge, black mohair couch that tickled you when you sat down on it. The lampshades had beaded fringes; the picture-frames that crowded the walls were of tarnished gilt and very wide, so that the pictures lost all importance; even in summer, velvet draperies hung at the windows.

"Come on, come on," said Sissy, and then, in a use of popular idiom that startled the ear, coming from an old woman, "Let's get going."

They dealt the cards again. In spite of her reputation for a poker face, of which she was proud, Sissy compressed her blatant lips. "I knew it!" she thought, and looked furiously at the cards that had personally insulted her. A three, a five, a nine, a ten, and a four, of different suits. It was unbearable.

"Hurry up, Orman," she said to Featherstone, who was still stumbling about with his great fingers among his cards. "What's the matter with you?"

She did not feel any better from observing the blissful expression that spread across Featherstone's red face. In his alcoholic state he couldn't conceal anything, she thought contemptuously. Damn the man. He must have a good hand.

Featherstone did have a good hand. Not only the first one, but the succeeding ones.

Even Bixby did well and had soon won back the five dollars he had lost the Wednesday before. But Featherstone, all guards down, could hardly contain himself.

"You see what it is, Sissy," he leaned toward her. "I'm on the crest of the wave. No matter what I do, it turns out. I'm helpless, you might say."

Sissy had heard his crest-of-the-wave theory before. Only long familiarity with the ups and down of play made it possible for her to conceal her discomfiture. She cackled more madly than ever and told several stories that made poor Charlie Cass turn quite pink.

"What's the matter, Charlie?" Sissy demanded. "You aren't a virgin."

"Oh, be quiet!" Charlie sniffed and seemed more old-maidish than ever, with his pale hair and delicate nose and soft chin.

"But that's not all," Sissy cackled, "listen to this one . . ."

And she regaled them with another tale, much appreciated by Bixby, who was wearing a particularly vivid red rose in his buttonhole. The rose was beginning to droop, though, because the house was warm with the windows closed. Outside they could hear the storm in all its fury. It had started as a thunder storm, with lightning, thunder and wind, but had settled down to a thrashing rain, straight out of the sea. It swept across the wide veranda and when Charlie lifted a corner of the blackout curtain they could see the windows were covered with a fine spray that looked like glistening insects clinging to the glass.

"Mary! Mary!" Sissy suddenly shrilled. It was ten o'clock and where was that girl. She always brought in the sandwiches and wine at ten o'clock. They needed something to sustain them, as they generally played until after midnight.

Presently Mary appeared from the kitchen. Indoors she looked awkward, as though it bothered her to know what to do with her legs and arms and her feet, which were too big for her now but when she had grown a little taller would be all right. She edged apprehensively around to the opposite side from Featherstone. She did not look at anyone, but silently set out a plate of sandwiches, glasses and a bottle of homemade elderberry wine with a red and white label on it and the date, 1922, in Sissy's bold handwriting.

"Ah!" said Bixby, rubbing his hands. "Some more of your elderberry. I think that's the best, Sissy," turning judicially to her, "though your black cherry is very good."

"So here's our pretty Mary again!" Old Featherstone was ingratiating. "Come around here my child. I won't eat you."

Mary's lower lip began to tremble. As she moved around the table the light from the lamp was thrown up in her face through the opening at the top of the shade. A blue vein stood out in her neck, under the delicate skin. It throbbed painfully.

"Cut it out," Charlie Cass said. "Leave the kid alone."

"Is there anything else you want, Auntie?" Mary whispered to Sissy. The old woman had not noticed what Featherstone had been saying, nor his rheumy eyes on Mary. Her mind was fixed on one thing alone, though she concealed it well. A hasty survey of her chips assured her that not only was she not winning, but she was losing again, for the third night in a row, and to Featherstone, who had a mountain of chips, tumbled every which way in front of him. It was enough to make her scream. Little spots danced before her eyes and her head hummed.

Mary silently vanished up the broad stairs to her room, Featherstone's eyes following her moistly. Charlie Cass went on in his complaining voice, helping himself to a sandwich, "For a man of your age, Featherstone, you certainly make a fool of yourself." But he liked Orman, so he didn't finish what was on his mind to say, that Featherstone was a drunken old satyr. "We've all got our faults," thought Charlie resignedly, thinking of Annie Grace, with whom he had lived for years, contributing not a nickel, or hardly a nickel, to the common household. All he paid for were his own clothes and spending money, out of a small legacy from an obscure relative.

Why did he lead such a life? God knows. You get in a rut. He looked sadly into his glass of elderberry wine.

"By George, this stuff has a kick to it," Bixby said, smacking his lips appreciatively.

Sissy tittered happily, barely touching it to her lips, her eyes fastened on Featherstone. She would get him this time.

When they resumed playing, Sissy found herself digging her nails spasmodically into her hands when the cards were dealt. They cut into the thin skin of her palms. She kept chewing her under lip, until Charlie asked her what was the matter. She hummed furiously the whole time they were playing. She mumbled within herself various charms and incantations, and kept knocking her knuckles on the solid mahogany of her chair.

But all these precautions and adjurations were of no use. Luck was not with her. She lost steadily. All her stubbornness rose to the surface. She was grimly determined to force luck. Even at midnight she did not want to give up, but demanded another round, until Bixby reminded them that he at any rate had a regular job to do and had to get up in the morning.

"I never saw anything like you, Sissy," he said to her. And then to Charlie, as though Sissy weren't there, "What vitality!"

In the stuffy room they sat over the figuring that Bixby was doing. "You both owe Featherstone," Bixby announced. He looked at Sissy, "You owe him twelve dollars and twenty-six cents."

Sissy's teeth were bared in a ghastly grin. She cackled.

"I've got to go home," said Bixby, getting up. "It's almost twelve-thirty."

Featherstone, who appeared to have something on his mind, disjointedly went over to the windows. There was a look of concentration and at the same time slyness, on his face. From the way he fumbled with the window, trying to get it open, it was obvious he was quite drunk. A blast of fresh, cold air came into the room, swelling through it and stirring the mouldy draperies. Featherstone breathed deeply.

"It's stopped raining," he announced in a thick voice. He poked his head out the window.

Bixby and Charlie had retrieved their hats in the hall and stood in the doorway, waiting for him. "You fellows go ahead . . ." Featherstone waved, sitting down suddenly on the mohair sofa. The pure air had unsettled him further.

Suddenly the impossible happened. Sissy Alvarez, "the best damn sport in the country" as Featherstone had once called her, burst into tears.

The three men looked at her, dumbfounded.

"What's the matter, Sissy?"

"Don't talk to me!" She lashed out at them, blubbering wildly, her lipstick smearing across the crazy runnels of her old face. "You know what's the matter."

Featherstone began to look as though he understood. "By golly," he said. "It's because I've won her money again." He straightened up. With all the authority at his command he said to the others, "You go along. I'll attend to this. This is my fault—" he hiccoughed politely behind his hand, "and I'll fix it up. I'll catch up with you." As the others hesitated, he winked at them broadly and nodded his head several times, "You leave it to me." He came a step nearer Charlie and said in a low tone, "I know her like a book. Known her longer than anybody in this goddamn town."

Charlie and Bixby were forced to admit this was so. But after all these years, and the good poker sessions they'd had, it was funny to see the old girl like this. The smeared lipstick . . . rather disgusting. Bixby looked at his watch. "Getting late," he said reluctantly.

"O.K.," Charlie said to Featherstone, who was watching them with eyes that were suddenly alert, "We'll walk on slowly."

They went out of the house together, closing the door after them.

"Whew!" Bixby shuddered a little, he did not know why. After a pause he went on, "It suddenly strikes you. That's a barn of an old place to live in, practically alone. You could get lost with all those stairways and passageways." He glanced back. Except for a streak of light under the black-out shades in the living room, the place was dark. The clapboard turret was a monstrous thing. Out of proportion, make-believe, but all the same impressive and very lonely. The stars had come out, but the wind still moaned a little down under the cliff. The storm had not gone without leaving traces of itself. Everything was dripping wet.

"Sissy," Featherstone sat down next to her. He consciously tried to keep his hand from trembling with the excitement he felt as he patted her arm. His voice, with a great effort, he made to sound almost soothing. He wished he hadn't started off with that horrible Spanish cognac at breakfast.

He took out his wallet. "I'm going to give back your money. By rights, I shouldn't have won it . . . it was your turn." He sniggered to himself at this heresy.

Sissy sat up abruptly. She glared at his wallet and watched him take out two five's, two one's, and twenty six cents from his pocket. Her very own money. He laid it on the table. She clutched it from the table and counted it furiously.

Smoothly, deliberately, Orman Featherstone got up, his eyes on the old woman.

"I'm going upstairs," he said softly.

She paid no attention to him. She counted the money over twice, and a third time. She stuffed it in the neck of her dress.

Featherstone was at the wide-open double door that led into the hall. With cat-like movements he crossed the hallway and stood at the foot of the stairway that led to the second floor. He put his foot on the bottom step. He was panting, and sweat stood out on his forehead.

"Sissy," his voice was more somnambulistic than before, "I'm going upstairs."

The old woman was humming furiously. She had taken the money out of the neck of her dress. She began to mumble.

Featherstone took two steps on the staircase. "Sissy—"

The old woman was counting over all she had won, and all she had lost, beginning away back, ten years ago. Her gains and her losses seemed to her like the horses in a race, now one pulled ahead, now another. She used up her fingers and began tallying off the beaded fringe on the lampshade.

Featherstone went step by cautious step up the stairs. Nothing must jar her; it must be very smooth. His eyes fastened compellingly on the old woman with her knotty, madly working fingers. Suddenly she looked up and across the room, toward the hall. Featherstone could feel his heart pounding. The sweat ran down his legs, inside his trousers. Those terribly sharp eyes focused. It seemed she understood. She stopped counting. She laughed wildly. Featherstone cringed before her laughter.

"I know! I know!" she shrieked at him. Taking fright, deflated, he began to descend the stairs. But the old woman suddenly seemed not to notice what he was doing and he stopped. She was shrieking at the top of her lungs. "I hate Mary!" She turned to him, "You drunken pig!" And then, "I hate Mary. I hate Mary! God will punish you, Mary! Up there sitting in your golden chair! God will find you out!"

Featherstone suddenly felt a demoniac strength in him. He turned and staggered up the stairs. He was mad with the desires that he had never dared face, long ago.

The old woman watched him, grinding the money in her hands. The light from below sent long shadows ahead of him up the stairs. He disappeared at the top. A door crashed. A piercing scream was followed by muffled cries. Something fell. "Auntie!" A single desperate word. The old woman cackled madly. "Ha! Ha! Mary!" She shook her fist at the sky, above the house, where Mary was.

Gleefully churning the money in her hand Sissy went outside onto the porch. The racket inside annoyed her. She shut the door behind her. The door was a thick oak door. Perhaps that is why the screams suddenly stopped.

The night spread silently over the land, the cliff, the sea. Far off, there was a glimmer of sheet lightning, the last of the retreating storm. The air was cool. Sissy felt cold and all at once she wanted her shawl to keep out the damp air. "Mary!" she called petulantly. "Mary! Oh dear. Where's that girl?"

RICHARD WRIGHT

The Man Who Lived Underground

I've got to hide, he told himself. His chest heaved as he waited crouching in a dark corner of the vestibule. He was tired of running and dodging. Either he had to find a place to hide, or he had to surrender. A police car swished by through the rain, its siren rising sharply. They're looking for me all over. . . . He crept to the door and squinted through the fogged plate-glass. He stiffened as the siren rose and died in the distance. Yes, he had to hide, but where? He gritted his teeth. Then a sudden movement in the street caught his attention. A throng of tiny columns of water snaked into the air from the perforations of a manhole cover. The columns stopped abruptly, as though the perforations had become clogged; a grey spout of sewer water jutted up from underground and lifted the circular metal cover, juggled it for a moment, then let it fall with a clang.

He hatched a tentative plan: he would wait until the siren sounded far off, then he would go out. He smoked and waited, tense. At last the siren gave him his signal; it wailed dying, going away from him. He stepped to the sidewalk, then paused and looked curiously at the open manhole, half expecting the cover to leap up again. He went to the center of the street and stooped and peered into the hole, but could see nothing. Water rustled in the black depths.

He started with terror; the siren sounded so near that he had the idea that he had been dreaming and had awakened to find the car upon him. He dropped instinctively to his knees and his hands grasped the rim of the manhole. The siren seemed to hoot directly above him and with a wild gasp of exertion he snatched the cover far enough off to admit his body. He swung his legs over the opening and lowered himself into watery darkness. He hung for an eternal moment to the rim by his fingertips, then he felt rough metal prongs and at once he knew that sewer workmen used these ridges to lower themselves into manholes. Fist over fist, he let his body sink until he could feel no more prongs. He swayed in dank space; the siren seemed to howl at the very rim of the manhole. He dropped and was washed violently into an ocean of warm, leaping water. His head was battered against a wall and he wondered if this was death. Frenziedly his fingers clawed and sank into a crevice. He steadied himself and measured the strength of the current with muscular tension. He stood slowly in water that dashed past his knees with fearful velocity.

He heard a prolonged scream of brakes and the siren broke off. Oh, God! They had found him! Looming above his head in the rain a white face hovered over the hole. "How did this damn thing get off?" he heard a policeman asked. He saw the steel cover move slowly until the whole looked like a quarter moon turned black. "Give me a hand here," someone asked. The cover clanged into place, muffling the sights and sounds of the upper world. Knee-deep in the pulsing current, he breathed with aching chest, filling his lungs with the hot stench of yeasty rot.

From the perforations of the manhole cover, delicate lances of hazy violet sifted down and wove a mottled pattern upon the surface of the streaking current. His lips parted as a car swept past along the wet pavement overhead, its heavy rumble soon dying out, like the hum of a plane speeding through a dense cloud. He had never thought that cars could sound like that; everything seemed strange and unreal under here. He stood in darkness for a long time, knee-deep in rustling water, musing.

The odor of rot had become so general that he no longer smelt it. He got his cigarettes, but discovered that his matches were wet. He searched and found a dry folder in the pocket of his shirt and managed to strike one; it flared weirdly in the wet gloom, glowing greenishly, turning red, orange, then yellow. He lit a crumpled cigarette; then, by the flickering light of the match, he looked for support so that he would not have to keep his muscles flexed against the pouring water. His pupils narrowed and he saw to either side of him two steaming walls that rose and curved inward some six feet above his head to form a dripping, mouse-colored dome. The bottom of the sewer was a sloping V-trough. To left, the sewer vanished in ashen fog. To right was a steep down-curve into which water plunged.

He saw now that had he not regained his feet in time, he would have been swept to death, or had he entered any other manhole he would have probably drowned. Above the rush of the current he heard sharper juttings of water; tiny streams were spewing into the sewer from smaller conduits. The match died; he struck another and saw a mass of debris sweep past him and clog the throat of the down-curve. At once the water began rising rapidly. Could he climb out before he drowned? A long hiss sounded and the debris was sucked from sight; the current lowered. He understood now what had made the water toss the manhole cover; the down-curve had become temporarily obstructed and the perforations had become clogged.

He was in danger: he might slide into a down-curve; he might wander with a lighted match into a pocket of gas and blow himself up; or he might contract some horrible disease. . . . Though wanting to leave, an irrational impulse held him rooted. To left, the convex ceiling swooped to a height of less than five feet. With cigarette slanting from pursed lips, he waded with taut muscles, his feet sloshing over the slimy bottom, his shoes sinking into spongy slop, the slate-colored water cracking in creamy foam against his knees. Pressing his flat left palm against the lowered ceiling, he struck another match and saw a metal pole nestling in a niche of the wall. Yes, some sewer workman had left it. He reached for it, then jerked his head away as a whisper of scurrying life whisked past and was still. He held the match close and saw a huge rat, wet with slime, blinking beady eyes and baring tiny fangs. The light blinded the rat and the frizzled head moved aimlessly. He grabbed the pole and let it fly against the rat's soft body; there was a shrill piping and the grizzly body splashed into the dun-colored water and was snatched out of sight, spinning in the scuttling stream.

He swallowed and pushed on, following the curve of the misty cavern, sounding the water with the pole. By the faint light of another manhole cover he saw, amid loose wet brick, a hole with walls of damp earth leading into blackness. Gingerly he poked the pole into it; it was hollow and went beyond the length of the pole. He shoved the pole before him, hoisted himself upward, got to his hands and knees, and crawled. After a few yards he paused, struck to wonderment by the silence; it seemed that he had traveled a million miles away from the world. As he inched forward again he could sense the bottom of the dirt tunnel becoming dry and lowering slightly. Slowly he rose and to his astonishment he stood erect. He could not hear the rustling of the water now and he felt confoundingly alone, yet lured by the darkness and silence.

He crept a long way, then stopped, curious, afraid. He put his right foot forward and it dangled in space; he drew back in fear. He thrust the pole outward and it swung in emptiness. He trembled, imagining the earth crumbling and burying him alive. He scratched a match and saw that the dirt floor sheered away steeply and widened into a sort of cave some five feet below him. An old sewer, he muttered. He cocked his head, hearing a feathery cadence which he could not identify. The match ceased to burn.

Using the pole as a kind of ladder, he slid down and stood in darkness. The air was a little fresher and he could still hear vague noises. Where was he? He felt suddenly that someone was standing near him and he turned sharply, but there was only darkness. He poked cautiously and felt a brick wall; he followed it and the strange sounds grew louder. He ought to get out of here. This was crazy. He could not remain here for any length of time; there was no food and no place to sleep. But the faint sounds tantalized him; they were strange but familiar. Was it a motor? A baby crying? Music? A siren? He groped on, and the sounds came so clearly that he could feel the pitch and timbre of human voices. Yes, singing! That was it! He listened with open mouth. It was a church service. Enchanted, he groped toward the waves of melody.

Jesus, take me to your home above
And fold me in the bosom of Thy love . . .

The singing was on the other side of a brick wall. Excited, he wanted to watch the service without being seen. Whose church was it? He knew most of the churches in this area above ground, but the singing sounded too strange and detached for him to guess. He looked to left, to right, down to the black dirt, then upwards and was startled to see a bright sliver of light slicing the darkness like the blade of a razor. He struck one of his two remaining matches and saw rusty pipes running along an old concrete ceiling. Photographically he located the exact position of the pipes in his mind. The match flame sank and he sprang upward; his hands clutched a pipe. He swung his legs and tossed his body onto the bed of pipes and they creaked, swaying up and down; he thought that the tier was about to crash, but nothing happened. He edged to the crevice and saw a segment of black men and women, dressed in white robes, singing, holding tattered songbooks in their black palms. His first impulse was to laugh, but he checked himself.

What was he doing? He was crushed with a sense of guilt. Would God strike him dead for that? The singing swept on and he shook his head, disagreeing in spite of himself. They oughtn't to do that, he thought. But he could think of no reason *why* they should not do it. Just singing with the air of the sewer blowing in on them. . . . He felt that he was gazing upon something abysmally obscene, yet he could not bring himself to leave.

After a long time he grew numb and dropped to the dirt. Pain throbbed in his legs and a deeper pain, induced by the sight of those black people groveling and begging for something they could never get, churned in him. A vague conviction made him feel that those people should stand unrepentant and yield no quarter in singing and praying, yet *he* had run away from the police, had pleaded with them to believe in *his* innocence. He shook his head, bewildered.

How long had he been down here? He did not know. This was a new kind of living for him; the intensity of feelings he had felt when looking at the church people sing made him certain that he had been down here a long time, but his mind told him that the time must have been short. In this darkness the only notion he had of time was when a match flared and measured time by its fleeting light. He groped back through the hole toward the sewer and the waves of song subsided and finally he could not hear them at all. He came to where the earth hole ended and he heard the noise of the current and time lived again for him, measuring the moments by the wash of water.

The rain must have slackened, for the flow of the water had lessened and came only to his ankles. Ought he go up into the streets and take his chances on hiding somewhere else? But they would surely catch him. The mere thought of dodging and running again from the police made him tense. No, he would stay and plot how to elude them. But what could he do down here? He walked forward into the sewer and came to another manhole cover; he stood beneath it, debating. Fine pencils of gold spilled suddenly from the little circles in the manhole cover and trembled on the surface of the current. Yes, street lamps. . . . It must be night. . . .

He went forward for about a quarter of an hour, wading aimlessly, poking the pole carefully before him. Then he stopped, his eyes fixed and intent. What's that? A strangely familiar image attracted and repelled him. Lit by the yellow stems from another manhole cover was a tiny nude body of a baby snagged by debris and half-submerged in water. Thinking that the baby was alive, he moved impulsively to save it, but his roused feelings told him that it was dead, cold, nothing, the same nothingness he had felt while watching the men and women singing in the church. Water blossomed about the tiny legs, the tiny arms, the tiny head, and rushed onward. The eyes were closed, as though in sleep; the fists were clenched, as though in protest; and the mouth gaped black in a soundless cry.

He straightened and drew in his breath, feeling that he had been staring for all eternity at the ripples of veined water skimming impersonally over the shriveled limbs. He felt as condemned as when the policemen had accused him. Involuntarily he lifted his hand to brush the vision away, but his arm fell listlessly to his side. Then he acted; he closed his eyes and reached forward slowly with the soggy shoe of his right foot and shoved the dead baby from where it had been lodged. He kept his eyes closed, seeing the little body twisting in the current as it floated from sight. He opened his eyes, shivered, placed his knuckles in the sockets, hearing the water speed in the somber shadows.

He tramped on, sensing at times a sudden quickening in the current as he passed some conduit whose waters were swelling the stream that slid by his feet. A few minutes later he was standing under another manhole cover, listening to the faint rumble of noises above ground. Streetcars and trucks, he mused. He looked down and saw a stagnant pool of grey-green sludge; at intervals a balloon-pocket rose from the scum, glistening a bluish-purple, and burst. Ten seconds later another dilation rose and burst. Then another. He turned, shook his head, and tramped back to the dirt cave by the church, his lips quivering.

Back in the cave, he sat and leaned his back against a dirt wall. His body was trembling slightly. Finally his senses quieted and he slept. When he awakened he felt stiff and cold. He had to leave this foul place, but leaving meant facing those policemen who had wrongly accused him. No, he could not go back above ground. He remembered the beating they had given him and how he had signed his name to a confession, a confession which he had not even read. He had been too tired when they had shouted at him, demanding that he sign his name; he had signed it to end his pain.

He stood and groped about in the darkness. The church singing had stopped. How long had he slept? He did not know. But he felt refreshed and hungry. He doubled his fist nervously, realizing that he could not make a decision. As he walked about he stumbled over an old rusty iron pipe. He picked it up and felt a jagged edge. Yes, there was a brick wall and he could dig into it. What would he find? Smiling, he groped to the brick wall, sat, and began digging idly into damp cement. I can't make any noise, he cautioned himself. As time passed he grew thirsty, but there was no water. He had to kill time or go above ground. The cement came out of the wall easily; he extracted four bricks and felt a soft draft blowing into his face. He stopped, afraid. Who was beyond? He waited a long time and nothing happened; then he began digging again, soundlessly, slowly; he enlarged the hole and crawled through into a dark room and collided with another wall. He felt his way to the right; the wall ended and his fingers toyed in space, like the antennae of an insect.

He fumbled on and his feet struck something hollow, like wood. What's this? He felt with his fingers. Steps. . . . He stooped and pulled off his shoes and mounted the stairs and saw a yellow chink of light shining and heard a low voice speaking. He placed his eye to a keyhole and saw the nude waxen figure of a man stretched out upon a white table. The voice, low-pitched and vibrant, mumbled indistinguishable words, neither rising nor falling. He craned his neck and squinted to see the man who was talking, but he could not locate him. Above the naked figure was suspended a huge glass container filled with a blood red liquid from which a white rubber tubing dangled. He crouched closer to the door and saw the tip end of a black object lined with pink satin. A coffin, he breathed. This is an undertaker's establishment. . . . A fine-spun lace of ice covered his body and he shuddered. A throaty chuckle sounded in the depths of the yellow room.

He turned to leave. Three steps down it occurred to him that a light-switch should be nearby; he felt along the wall, found an electric button, pressed it, and a blinding glare smote his pupils so hard that he was sightless, defenseless. His pupils contracted and he wrinkled his nostrils at a peculiar odor. At once he knew that he had been dimly aware of this odor in the darkness, but the light had brought it sharply to his attention. Some kind of stuff they use to embalm, he thought. He went down the steps and saw piles of lumber, coffins, and a long work bench. In one corner was a tool chest. Yes, he could use tools, could tunnel through walls with them. He lifted the lid of the chest and saw nails, a hammer, a crowbar, a screw-driver, a light bulb, and a long length of electric wire. Good! He would lug these back to his cave.

He was about to hoist the chest to his shoulder when he discovered a door behind the furnace. Where did it lead? He tried to open it and found it securely bolted. Using the crowbar so as to make no sound, he pried the door open; it swung on creaking hinges, outward. Fresh air came to his face and he caught the faint roar of faraway sound. Easy now, he told himself. He widened the door and a lump of coal rattled toward him. A coal bin. . . . Evidently the door led into another basement. The roaring noise was louder now, but he could not identify it. Where was he? He groped slowly over the coal pile, then ranged in darkness over a gritty floor. The roaring noise seemed to come from above him, then below. His fingers followed a wall until he touched a wooden ridge. A door, he breathed.

The noise died to a low pitch; he felt his skin prickle. It seemed that he was playing a game with an unseen person whose intelligence outstripped his. He put his ear to the flat surface of the door. Yes, voices. . . . Was this a prizefight stadium? The sound of the voices came clear and sharp, but he could not tell if they were joyous or despairing. He twisted the knob till he heard a soft click and felt the springy weight of the door swinging toward him. He was afraid to open it, yet captured by curiosity and wonder. He jerked the door wide and saw on the far side of the basement a furnace glowing red. Ten feet away was still another door, half ajar. He crossed and peered through the door into an empty, high-ceilinged corridor that terminated in a dark complex of shadow. The belling voices rolled about him and his eagerness mounted. He stepped into the corridor and the voices swelled louder. He crept on and came to a narrow stairway leading circularly upwards; there was no question but that he was going to ascend those stairs.

Mounting the spiraled staircase, he heard the voices roll in a steady wave, then leap to crescendo, only to die away, but always remaining audible. Ahead of him glowed red letters: E — X — I — T. At the top of the steps he paused in front of a black curtain that fluttered uncertainly. He parted the folds and looked into a convex depth that gleamed with clusters of shimmering lights. Sprawling below him was a stretch of human faces, tilted upwards, chanting, whistling, screaming, laughing. Dangling before the faces, high upon a screen of silver, were jerking shadows. A movie, he said with slow laughter breaking from his lips.

He stood in a box in the reserved section of a movie house and the impulse he had had to tell the people in the church to stop their singing seized him. These people are *laughing* at their lives, he thought with amazement. They were shouting and yelling at the animated shadows of themselves. His compassion fired his imagination and he stepped out of the box, walked out upon thin air, walked on down to the audience; and, hovering in air just above them, he stretched out his hand to touch them. . . . His tension snapped and he found himself back in the box, looking down into the sea of faces. No; it could not be done; he could not awaken them. He sighed. Yes, these people were children, sleeping in their living, awake in their dying.

He turned away, parted the black curtain and looked out. He saw no one. He started down the white stone steps and when he reached the bottom he saw a white man in trim blue uniform coming towards him. So used had he become to being underground that he thought that he could walk past the man, as though he were a ghost. But the man stopped. And he stopped.

"Looking for the men's room, sir?" the man asked; and, without waiting for an answer, he turned and pointed; "This way, sir. The first door to your right."

He watched the man turn and walk up the steps and go out of sight. Then he laughed. What a funny fellow. . . ! He went back to the basement and stood in the red darkness, watching the glowing embers in the furnace. He went to the sink and turned the faucet and the water flowed in a smooth silent stream that looked like a spout of blood. He brushed the mad image from his mind and began to wash his hands leisurely, looking about for the usual bar of soap. He found one and rubbed it in his palms until a rich lather bloomed in his cupped fingers, like a scarlet sponge. He scrubbed and rinsed his hands meticulously, then hunted for a towel; there was none. He shut off the water, pulled off his shirt, dried his hands on it; when he put it on again he was grateful for the cool dampness that came to his skin.

Yes, he was thirsty; he turned on the faucet again, bowled his fingers and when the water bubbled over the brim of his cupped palms, he drank in long, slow swallows. His bladder grew tight; he shut off the water, faced the wall, bent his head and watched a red stream strike the floor. His nostrils wrinkled against acrid wisps of vapor; though he had tramped in the waters of the sewer, he stepped back from the wall so that his shoes, wet with sewer slime, would not touch his urine.

He heard footsteps and crawled quickly into the coal bin. Lumps rattled noisily. The footsteps came into the basement and stopped. Who was it? Had someone heard him and had come down to investigate? He waited, crouching, sweating. For a long time there was silence, then he heard the clang of metal and a brighter glow lit the room. Somebody's tending the furnace, he thought. Footsteps came closer and he stiffened. Looming before him was a white face lined with coal dust, the face of an old man with watery blue eyes. Highlights spotted his gaunt cheekbones, and he held a huge shovel. There was a screechy scrape of metal against stone, and the old man lifted a shovel full of coal and went from sight.

The room dimmed momentarily, then a yellow glare came as coal flared at the furnace door. Six times the old man came to the bin and went to the furnace with shovels of coal, but not once did he lift his eyes. Finally he dropped the shovel, mopped his face with a dirty handkerchief, and sighed: furnace door banged shut; the old man shuffled back to the coal bin, "Wheeew. . . ." He turned slowly and trudged out of the basement, his footsteps dying away.

He stood, and lumps of coal clattered down the pile. He stepped from the bin and was startled to see the shadowy outline of an electric bulb hanging above his head. Why had not the old man turned it on? Oh, yes. . . . He understood. The old man had worked here for so long that he had no need for light; he had learned a way of seeing in his dark world, like those sightless worms that inch along underground by a sense of touch.

His eyes fell upon a lunch pail and he was afraid to hope that it was full. He picked it up; it was heavy. He opened it. *Sandwiches. . . !* He looked guiltily around; he was alone. He searched farther and found a folder of matches and a half empty tin of tobacco; he put them eagerly into his pocket and clicked off the light. With the lunch pail under his arm, he went through the door, groped over the pile of coal, and stood again in the lighted basement of the undertaking establishment. I've got to get those tools, he told himself. And turn off that light. . . . He tiptoed back up the steps and switched off the light; the invisible voice still droned on behind the door. He crept down and, seeing with his fingers, opened the lunch pail and tore off a piece of paper bag and brought out the tin and spilled grains of tobacco into the makeshift concave. He rolled it and wet it with spittle, then inserted one end into his mouth and lit it; he sucked smoke that bit his lungs. The nicotine reached his brain, went out along his arms to his fingertips, down to his stomach and over all the tired nerves of his body.

He carted the tools to the hole he had made in the wall. Would the noise of the falling chest betray him? But he would have to take a chance; he had to have those tools. He lifted the chest and shoved it; it hit the dirt on the other side of the wall with a loud clatter. He waited, listening; nothing happened. Head first, he slithered through and stood in the cave. He grinned, filled with a cunning idea. Yes, he would now go back into the basement of the undertaking establishment and crouch behind the coal pile and dig another hole. Sure! Fumbling, he opened the tool chest and extracted a crowbar, the screw-driver, and a hammer; he fastened them securely about his person.

With another lumpish cigarette in his flexed lips, he crawled back through the hole and over the coal pile and sat, facing the brick wall. He jabbed with the crowbar and the cement sheered away; quicker than he thought, a brick came loose. He worked an hour; the other bricks did not come easily. He sighed, weak from effort. I ought to rest a little, he thought. I'm hungry. . . . He felt his way back to the cave and stumbled along the wall till he came to the tool chest. He sat upon it, opened the lunch pail and took out two thick sandwiches. He smelt them. Porkchops. . . ! His mouth watered. He closed his eyes and devoured a sandwich, savoring the smooth rye bread and juicy meat. He ate rapidly, gulping down lumpy mouthfuls that made him long for water. He ate the other sandwich and found an apple and gobbled that up too, sucking the core till the last trace of flavor was drained from it. Then, like a dog, he ground the meat bones with his teeth, enjoying the salty, tangy marrow. He finished and stretched out full length on the ground and went to sleep. . . .

. . . His body was washed by cold water that gradually turned warm and he was buoyed upon a stream and swept out to sea where waves rolled gently and suddenly he found himself walking upon the water how strange and delightful to walk upon the water and he came upon a nude woman holding a nude baby in her arms and the woman was sinking into the water holding the baby above her head and screaming *help* and he ran over the water to the woman and he reached her just before she went down and he took the baby from her hands and stood watching the breaking bubbles where the woman sank and he called *lady* but there was no answer and he called again *lady* and still no answer yes dive down there and rescue that woman but he could not take this baby with him and he stooped and laid the baby tenderly upon the surface of the water expecting it to sink but it floated and he leaped into the water and held his breath and strained his eyes to see through the gloomy volume of water but there was no woman and he opened his mouth and called *lady* and the water bubbled and his chest ached and his arms were tired but he could not see the woman and he called again *lady lady* and his feet touched sand at the bottom of the sea and his chest felt as though it would burst and he bent his knees and propelled himself upward and water rushed past him and his head bobbed out and he breathed deeply and looked around where was the baby the baby was gone and he rushed over the water looking for the baby calling *where is it* and the empty sky and sea threw back his voice *where is it* and he began to doubt that he could stand upon the water and then he was sinking and as he struggled the water rushed him downward spinning dizzily and he opened his mouth to call for help and water surged into his lungs and he choked. . . .

He groaned and leaped erect in the dark, his eyes wide. The images of terror that thronged his brain would not let him sleep. He rose, made sure that the tools were hitched to his belt, and groped his way to the coal pile and found the rectangular gap from which he had taken the bricks. He took out the crowbar and hacked. Then dread paralyzed him. How long had he slept? Was it day or night now? He had to be careful. Someone might hear him if it were day. He hewed softly for hours at the cement, working silently. Faintly quivering in the air above him was the dim sound of yelling voices. Crazy people, he muttered. They're still there in that movie. . . .

Having rested, he found the digging much easier. He soon had a dozen bricks out. His spirits rose. He took out another brick and his fingers fluttered in space. Good! What lay ahead of him? Another basement? He made the hole larger, climbed through, walked over an uneven floor and felt a metal surface. He lighted a match and saw that he was standing behind a furnace in a basement; before him, on the far side of the room, was a door. He crossed and opened it; it was full of odds and ends. Daylight spilled from a window above his head.

Then he was aware of a soft, continuous tapping. What was it? A clock? No, it was louder than a clock and more irregular. He placed an old empty box beneath the window, stood upon it, and looked into an areaway. He eased the window up and crawled through; the sound of the tapping came clearly now. He glanced about; he was alone. Then he looked upward at a series of window ledges. The tapping identified itself. That's a typewriter, he said to himself. It seemed to be coming from just above him. He grasped the ridges of a rainpipe and lifted himself upward; through a half-inch opening of window he saw a doorknob about three feet away. No, it was not a doorknob; it was a small circular disc made of stainless steel with many fine markings upon it. He held his breath; an eerie white hand, seemingly detached from its arm, touched the metal knob and twirled it, first to left, then to right. It's a safe. . . ! Suddenly he could see the dial no more; a huge metal door swung slowly towards him and he was looking into a safe filled with green wads of paper money, rows of coins wrapped in brown paper, and glass jars and boxes of various sizes. His heart quickened. Good Lord! The white hand went in and out of the safe, taking wads of bills and cylinders of coins. The hand vanished and he heard the muffled click of the big door as it closed. Only the steel dial was visible now. The typewriter still tapped in his ears, but he could not see it. He blinked, wondering if what he had seen was real. There was more money in that safe than he had seen in all his life.

Still clinging to the rainpipe, a daring idea came to him and he pulled the screw-driver from his belt. If the white hand twirled that dial again, he would be able to see how far to left and right it spun and he would have the combination! His blood tingled. I can scratch the numbers right here, he thought. Holding the pipe with one hand, he made the sharp edge of the screw-driver bite into the brick wall. Yes, he could do it. Now, he was set. Now, he had a reason for staying here in the underground. He waited for a long time, but the white hand did not return. Goddamn! Had he been more alert, he could have counted the twirls and he would have had the combination. He got down and stood in the areaway, sunk in reflection.

How could he get into that room? He climbed back into the basement and saw wooden steps leading upwards. Was that the room where the safe stood? Fearing that the dial was now being twirled, he clambered through the window, hoisted himself up the rainpipe, and peered; he saw only the naked gleam of the steel dial. He got down and doubled his fists. Well, he would explore the basement. He returned to the basement room and mounted the steps to the door and squinted through the keyhole; all was dark, but the tapping was still somewhere near, still faint and directionless. He pushed the door in; along one wall of a room was a table piled with radios and electrical equipment. A radio shop, he muttered.

Well, he could rig up a radio in his cave. He found a sack, slid the radio into it and slung it across his back. Closing the door, he went down the steps and stood again in the basement, disappointed. He had not solved the problem of the steel dial and he was irked. He set the radio on the floor and again hoisted himself through the window and up the rainpipe and squinted; the metal door was swinging shut. Goddamn. . . ! He's worked the combination again. . . . If I had been patient, I'd have had it! How could he get into that room? He *had* to get into it. He could jimmy the window, but it would be much better if he could get in without any traces. To right of him, he calculated, should be the basement of the building that held the safe; therefore, if he dug a hole right *here,* he ought to reach his goal.

He began a quiet scraping; it was hard work, for the bricks were not damp. He eventually got one out and lowered it softly to the floor. He had to be careful; perhaps people were beyond this wall. He extracted a second layer of brick and found still another. He gritted his teeth, ready to quit. I'll dig one more, he resolved. When the next brick came out he felt air blowing into his face. He waited to be challenged, but nothing happened.

He enlarged the hole and pulled himself through and stood in quiet darkness. He scratched a match to flame and saw steps; he mounted and peered through a keyhole: Darkness. . . . He strained to hear the typewriter, but there was only silence. Maybe the office had closed? He twisted the knob and swung the door in; a frigid blast made him shiver. In the shadows before him were halves and quarters of hogs and lambs and steers hanging from metal hooks on the low ceiling, red meat encased in folds of cold white fat. Fronting him was a frost-coated glass from behind which came indistinguishable sounds. The odor of fresh raw meat sickened him and he backed away. A meat market, he whispered.

He ducked his head, suddenly blinded by light. He narrowed his eyes; the red-white rows of meat were drenched in yellow glare. A man wearing a crimson-spotted jacket came in and took down a bloody meat cleaver. He eased the door to, holding it ajar just enough to watch the man, hoping that the darkness in which he stood would keep him from being seen. The man took down a hunk of steer and placed it upon a bloody wooden block and bent forward and whacked with the cleaver. The man's face was hard, square, grim; a jet of mustache smudged his upper lip and a glistening cowlick of hair fell over his left eye. Each time he lifted the cleaver and brought it down upon the meat, he let out a short, deep-chested grunt. After he had cut the meat, he wiped blood off the wooden block with a sticky wad of gunny sack and hung the cleaver upon a hook. His face was proud as he placed the chunk of meat in the crook of his elbow and left.

The door slammed and the light went off; once more he stood in shadow. His tension ebbed. From behind the frosted glass he heard the man's voice: "Forty-eight cents a pound, Ma'am." He shuddered, feeling that there was something he had to do. But what? He stared fixedly at the cleaver, then he sneezed and was terrified for fear that the man had heard him. But the door did not open. He took down the cleaver and examined the sharp edge smeared with cold blood. Behind the ice-coated glass a cash register rang with a vibrating, musical tinkle.

Absentmindedly holding the meat cleaver, he rubbed the glass with his thumb and cleared a spot that enabled him to see into the front of the store. The shop was empty, save for the man who was now putting on his hat and coat. Beyond the front window a wan sun shone in the streets; people passed and now and then a fragment of laughter or the whir of a speeding auto came to him. He peered closer and saw on the right counter of the shop a mosquito netting covering pears, grapes, lemons, oranges, bananas, peaches, and plums. His stomach contracted.

The man clicked out the light and he gritted his teeth, muttering, Don't lock the icebox door. . . ! The man went through the door of the shop and locked it from the outside. Thank God! Now, he would eat some more! He waited, trembling. The sun died and its rays lingered on in the sky, turning the streets to dusk. He opened the door and stepped inside the shop. In reverse letters across the front window was: NICK'S FRUITS AND MEATS. He laughed, picked up a soft ripe yellow pear and bit into it; juice squirted; his mouth ached as his saliva glands reacted to the acid of the fruit. He ate three pears, gobbled six bananas, and made away with several oranges, taking a bite out of their tops and holding them to his lips and squeezing them as he hungrily sucked the juice.

He found a faucet, turned it, laid the cleaver aside, pursed his lips under the stream until his stomach felt about to burst. He straightened and belched, feeling satisfied for the first time since he had been underground. He sat upon the floor, rolled and lit a cigarette, his blood-shot eyes squinting against the film of drifting smoke. He watched a patch of sky turn red, then purple;

night fell and he lit another cigarette, brooding. Some part of him was trying to remember the world he had left, and another part of him did not want to remember it. Sprawling before him in his mind was his wife, Mrs. Wooten for whom he worked, the three policemen who had picked him up. . . . He possessed them now more completely than he had ever possessed them when he had lived above ground. How this had come about he could not say, but he had no desire to go back to them. He laughed, crushed the cigarette, and stood up.

He went to the front door and gazed out. Emotionally he hovered between the world above ground and the world underground. He longed to go out, but sober judgment urged him to remain here. Then impulsively he pried the lock loose with one swift twist of the crowbar; the door swung outward. Through the twilight he saw a white man and a white woman coming towards him. He held himself tense, waiting for them to pass; but they came directly to the door and confronted him.

"I want to buy a pound of grapes," the woman said.

Terrified, he stepped back into the store. The white man stood to one side and the woman entered.

"Give me a pound of the dark ones," the woman said.

The white man came slowly forward, blinking his eyes.

"Where's Nick?" the man asked.

"Were you just closing?" the woman asked.

"Yes, ma'am," he mumbled. For a second he did not breathe, then he mumbled again: "Yes, ma'am."

"I'm sorry," the woman said.

The street lamps came on, lighting the store somewhat. Ought he run? But that would raise an alarm. He moved slowly, dreamily, to a counter and lifted up a bunch of grapes and showed them to the woman.

"Fine," the woman said. "But isn't that more than a pound?"

He did not answer. The man was staring at him intently.

"Put them in a bag for me," the woman said, fumbling with her purse.

"Yes, ma'am."

He saw a pile of paper bags under a narrow ledge; he opened one and put the grapes in.

"Thanks," the woman said, taking the bag and placing a dime in his dark palm.

"Where's Nick?" the man asked again. "At supper?"

"Sir? Yes, sir," he breathed.

They left the store and he stood trembling in the doorway. When they were out of sight, he burst out laughing and crying. A trolley-car rolled noisily past and he controlled himself quickly. He flung the dime to the pavement with a gesture of contempt and stepped into the warm night air. A few shy stars trembled above him. The look of things was beautiful, yet he felt a lurking threat. He went to an unattended newsstand and looked at a stack of papers. He saw a headline: HUNT NEGRO FOR MURDER.

He felt that someone had slipped upon him from behind and was stripping off his clothes; he looked about wildly, went quickly back into the store, picked up the meat cleaver where he had left it near the sink, then made his way through the icebox to the basement. He stood for a long time, breathing heavily. They know I didn't do anything, he muttered. But how could he prove it? He had signed a confession. Though innocent, he felt guilty, condemned. He struck a match and held it near the steel blade, fascinated and repelled by the dried blotches of blood. Then his fingers gripped the handle of the cleaver with all the strength of his body, he wanted to fling the cleaver from him, but he could not. The match flame wavered and fled; he struggled through the hole and put the cleaver in the sack with the radio. He was determined to keep it, for what purpose he did not know.

He was about to leave when he remembered the safe. Where was it? He wanted to give up, but felt that he ought to make one more try. Opposite the last hole he had dug, he tunneled again, plying the crowbar. Once he was so exhausted that he lay on the concrete floor and panted. Finally he made another hole. He wriggled through and his nostrils filled with the fresh smell of coal. He struck a match; yes, the usual steps led upward. He tiptoed to a door and eased it open. A fair-haired white girl stood in front of a steel cabinet, her blue eyes wide upon him. She turned chalky and gave a high-pitched scream. He bounded down the steps and raced to his hole and clambered through, replacing the bricks with nervous haste. He paused, hearing loud voices.

"What's the matter, Alice?"

"A man . . ."

"What man? Where. . . ?"

"A man was at that door . . ."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"He was looking at me through the door!"

"Aw, you're dreaming."

"I *did* see a man!"

The girl was crying now.

"There's nobody here."

Another man's voice sounded.

"What is it, Bob?"

"Alice says she saw a man in here, in that door. . . ."

"Let's take a look."

He waited, poised for flight. Footsteps descended the stairs.

"There's nobody down here."

"The window's locked."

"And there's no door."

"You ought to fire that dame."

"Oh, I don't know. Women are that way."

"She's too hysterical."

The men laughed. Footsteps sounded again on the stairs. A door slammed. He sighed, relieved that he had escaped. But he had not done what he had set out to do; his glimpse of the room had been too brief to determine if the safe was there. He had to know. Boldly he groped through the hole once more; he reached the steps and pulled off his shoes and tiptoed up and peered through the keyhole. His head accidentally touched the door and it swung silently in a fraction of an inch; he saw the girl bent over the cabinet, her back to him. Beyond her was the safe. He crept back down the steps, thinking exultingly: I found it!

Now he had to get the combination. Even if the window in the areaway was locked and bolted, he could gain entrance when the office closed. He scoured through the holes he had dug and stood again in the basement where he had left the radio and the cleaver. Again he crawled out of the window and lifted himself up the rainpipe and peered. The steel dial showed lonely and bright, reflecting the yellow glow of an unseen light. Resigned to a long wait, he sat and leaned against a wall. From far off came the faint sounds of life above ground; once he looked with a baffled expression at the dark sky. Frequently he rose and climbed the pipe to see the white hand spin the dial, but nothing happened. He bit his lips with impatience. It was not the money that was luring him, but the mere fact that he could get it with impunity. Was the hand now twirling the dial? He rose and looked, but the white hand was not in sight.

Perhaps it would be better to watch continuously? Yes; he clung to the pipe and watched the dial until his eyes thickened with tears. Exhausted, he stood again in the areaway. He heard a door being shut and he clawed up the pipe and looked. He jerked tense as a vague figure passed in front of him. He stared unblinking, hugging the pipe with one hand and holding the screw-driver with the other, ready to etch the combination upon the wall. His ears caught: *Dong* . . . *Dong* . . . *Dong* . . . *Dong* . . . *Dong* . . . *Dong* . . . *Dong* . . . Seven o'clock, he whispered. Maybe they were closing now? What kind of a store would be open as late as this? he wondered. Did anyone live in the rear? Was there a night watchman? Perhaps the safe was *already* locked for the night! Goddamn! While he had been eating in that shop, they had locked up everything. . . . Then, just as he was about to give up, the white hand touched the dial and turned it once to right and stopped. With quivering fingers, he etched 1-R-6 upon the brick wall with the tip of the screw-driver. The hand twirled the dial twice to left and stoped at two and he engraved 2-L-2 upon the wall. The dial was spun four times to right and stopped at six again; he wrote 4-R-6. The dial rotated three times to left and was centered straight up and down; again he wrote 3-L-0. The door swung open and again he saw the piles of green money and the rows of wrapped coins. I got it, he said grimly.

Then he was stone still, astonished. There were two hands now. A right hand lifted a wad of green bills and deftly slipped it up the sleeve of a left arm. The hands trembled; again the right hand slipped a packet of bills up the left sleeve. He's stealing, he said to himself. He grew indignant, as if the money belonged to him. Though *he* had planned to steal the money, he despised and pitied the man. He felt that his stealing the money and the man's stealing were two entirely alien things. He wanted to steal the money merely for the sensation involved in getting it, and he had no intention whatever of spending a penny of it; but he knew that the man who was now stealing it was going to spend it, perhaps for pleasure. The huge steel door closed with a soft click.

Though angry, he was somewhat satisfied. The office would close soon. I'll clean the place out, he mused. He imagined the entire office staff cringing with fear; the police would question everyone for a crime they had not committed, just as they had questioned him. And they would have no idea of how the money had been stolen until they discovered the holes he had tunneled in the walls of the basements. He lowered himslf and laughed mischievously, with the abandoned glee of an adolescent.

He flattened himself against the wall as the window above him closed with rasping sound. He looked; somebody was bolting the window securely with a metal screen. That won't help you, he snickered to himself. He clung to the rainpipe until the yellow light in the office went out. He went back into the basement, picked up the sack containing the radio and cleaver and crawled through the two holes he had dug and groped his way into the basement of the building that held the safe. He moved in slow motion, breathing softly. Be careful now, he told himself. There might be a night watchman. . . . In his memory was the combination written in bold white characters as upon a blackboard. Eel-like he squeezed through the last hole and crept up the steps and put his hand on the knob and pushed the door in about three inches. Then his courage ebbed; his imagination wove dangers for him.

Perhaps the night watchman was waiting in there, ready to shoot. He dangled his cap on a forefinger and poked it past the jamb of the door. If anyone fired, they would hit his cap; but nothing happened. He widened the door, holding the crowbar high above his head, ready to beat off an assailant. He stood like that for five minutes; the rumble of a streetcar brought him to himself. He entered the room. Moonlight flooded in from a side window. He confronted the safe, then checked himself. Better take a look around first. . . . He stepped about and found a closed door. Was the night watchman in there? He opened it and saw a washbowl, a faucet, and a commode. To left was still another door that opened into a huge dark room that seemed empty; on the far side of that room he made out the shadow of still another door. Nobody's here, he told himself.

He turned back to the safe and fingered the dial; it spun with ease. He laughed and twirled it just for fun. Get to work, he told himself. He turned the dial to the figures he saw on the blackboard of his memory; it was so easy that he felt that the safe had not been locked at all. The heavy door eased loose and he caught hold of the handle and pulled hard, but the door swung open with a slow momentum of its own. Breathless, he gaped at wads of green bills, rows of wrapped coins, curious glass jars full of white pellets, and many oblong green metal boxes. He glanced guiltily over his shoulder; it seemed impossible that someone should not call to him to stop.

They'll be surprised in the morning, he thought. He opened the top of the sack and lifted a wad of compactly tied bills; the money was crisp and new. He admired the smooth, clean-cut edges. The fellows in Washington sure know how to make this stuff, he mused. He rubbed the money with his fingers, as though expecting it to reveal hidden qualities. He lifted the wad to his nose and smelt the fresh odor of ink. Just like any other paper, he mumbled. He dropped the wad into the sack and picked up another. Holding the bag, he thought and laughed.

There was in him no sense of possessiveness; he was intrigued with the form and color of the money, with the manifold reactions which he knew that men above ground held toward it. The sack was one-third full when it occurred to him to examine the denominations of the bills; without realizing it, he had put many wads of one-dollar bills into the sack. Aw, nuts, he said in disgust. Take the big ones. . . . He dumped the one-dollar bills onto the floor and swept all the hundred-dollar bills he could find into the sack, then he raked in rolls of coins with crooked fingers.

He walked to a desk upon which sat a typewriter, the same machine which the blonde girl had used. He was fascinated by it; never in his life had he used one of them. It was a queer instrument of business, something beyond the rim of his life. Whenever he had been in an office where a girl was typing, he had almost always spoken in whispers. Remembering vaguely what he had seen others do, he inserted a sheet of paper into the machine; it went in lopsided and he did not know how to straighten it. Spelling in a soft diffident voice, he pecked out his name on the keys: *freddaniels*. He looked at it and laughed. He would learn to type correctly one of these days.

Yes, he would take the typewriter too. He lifted the machine and placed it atop the bulk of money in the sack. He did not feel that he was stealing, for the cleaver, the radio, the money, and the typewriter were all on the same level of value, all meant the same thing to him. They were the serious toys of the men who lived in the dead world of sunshine and rain he had left, the world that had condemned him, branded him guilty.

But what kind of a place is this? he wondered. What was in that dark room to his rear? He felt for his matches and found that he had only one left. He leaned the sack against the safe and groped forward into the room, encountering smooth, metallic objects that felt like machines. Baffled, he touched a wall and tried vainly to locate an electric switch. Well, he *had* to strike his last match. He knelt and struck it, cupping the flame near the floor with his palms. The place seemed to be a factory, with benches and tables. There were bulbs with green shades spaced about the tables; he turned on a light and twisted it low so that the glare was limited. He saw a half filled packet of cigarettes and appropriated it. There were stools at the benches and he concluded that men worked here at some trade. He wandered and found a few half used folders of matches. If only he could find more cigarettes! But there were none.

But what kind of a place was this? On a bench he saw a pad of paper captioned: PEER'S — MANUFACTURING JEWELERS. His lips formed an 'O,' then he snapped off the light and ran back to the safe and lifted one of the glass jars and stared at the tiny white pellets. Gingerly he picked up one and found that it was wrapped in tissue paper. He peeled the paper and saw a glittering stone that looked like glass, glinting white and blue sparks. Diamonds, he breathed.

Roughly he tore the paper from the pellets and soon his palm quivered with precious fire. Trembling, he took all four glass jars from the safe and put them into the sack. He grabbed one of the metal boxes, shook it, and heard a tinny rattle. He pried the lid off with the screw-driver. Rings! Hundreds of them. . . ! Were they worth anything? He scooped up a handful and jets of fire shot fitfully from the stones. These are diamonds too, he said. He pried open another box. Watches! A chorus of soft, metallic ticking filled his ears. For a moment he could not move, then he dumped all the boxes into the sack.

He shut the safe door, then stood looking around, anxious not to overlook anything. Oh! He had seen a door in the room where the machines were. What was in there? More valuables? He re-entered the room, crossed the floor and stood undecided before the door. He finally caught hold of the knob and pushed the door in; the room beyond was dark. He advanced cautiously inside and ran his fingers along the wall for the usual switch, then he was stark still. Something had moved in the room! What was it? Ought he creep out, taking the rings and diamonds and money? Why risk what he already had? He waited and the ensuing silence gave him confidence to explore farther. Dare he strike a match? Would not a match flame make him a good target? He tensed again as he heard a faint sigh; he was now convinced that there was something alive near him, something that lived and breathed. On tiptoe he felt slowly along the wall, hoping that he would not collide with anything. Luck was with him; he found the light switch.

No; don't turn the light on. . . . Then suddenly he realized that he did not know in what direction the door was. Goddamn! He had to turn the light on or strike a match. He fingered the switch for a long time, then thought of an idea. He knelt upon the floor, reached his arm up to the switch and flicked the button, hoping that if anyone shot the bullet would go above his head. The moment the light came on he narrowed his eyes to see quickly. He sucked in his breath and his body gave a violent twitch and was still. In front of him, so close that it made him want to bound up and scream, was a human face.

He was afraid to move lest he touch the man. If the man had opened his eyes at that moment, there was no telling what he might have done. The man—long and raw-boned—was stretched out on his back upon a little cot, sleeping in his clothes, his head cushioned by a dirty pillow; his face, clouded by a dark stubble of beard, looked straight up to the ceiling. The man sighed, and he grew tense to defend himself; the man mumbled and turned his face away from the light. I've got to turn off that light, he thought. Just as he was about to rise, he saw a gun and cartridge belt on the floor at the man's side. Yes, he would take the gun and cartridge belt, not to use them, but just to keep them, as one takes a memento from a country fair. He picked them up and was about to click off the light when his eyes fell upon a photograph perched upon a chair near the man's head; it was the picture of a woman, smiling, shown against a background of open fields; at the woman's side were two young children, a boy and a girl. He smiled indulgently; he could send a bullet into that man's brain and time would be over for him. . . .

He clicked off the light and crept silently back into the room where the safe stood; he fastened the cartridge belt about him and adjusted the holster at his right hip. He strutted about the room on tiptoe, lolling his head nonchalantly, then paused abruptly, pulled the gun and pointed it with grim face toward an imaginary foe. "Boom!" he whispered fiercely. Then he bent forward with silent laughter. That's just like they do it in the movies, he said.

He contemplated his loot for a long time, then got a towel from the washroom and tied the sack securely. When he looked up he was momentarily frightened by his shadow looming on the wall before him. He lifted the sack, dragged it down the basement steps, lugged it across the basement, gasping for breath. After he had struggled through the hole, he clumsily replaced the bricks, then tussled with the sack until he got it to the cave. He stood in the dark, wet with sweat, brooding about the diamonds, the rings, the watches, the money; he remembered the singing in the church, the people yelling in the movie, the dead baby, the nude man stretched out upon the white table . . . He saw these items hovering before his eyes and felt that some dim meaning linked them together, that some magical relationship made them kin. He stared with vacant eyes, convinced that all of these images, with their tongueless reality, were striving to tell him something. . . .

Later, seeing with his fingers, he untied the sack and set each item neatly upon the dirt floor. Exploring, he took the bulb, the socket, and the wire out of the tool chest; he was elated to find a double socket at one end of the wire. He crammed the stuff into his pockets and hoisted himself upon the rusty pipes and squinted into the church; it was dim and empty. Somewhere in this wall were live electric wires; but where? He lowered himself, groped and tapped the wall with the butt of the screw-driver, listening vainly for hollow sounds. I'll just take a chance and dig, he said.

For an hour he tried to dislodge a brick, and when he struck a match he found that he had dug a depth of only an inch! No use in digging here, he sighed. By the flickering light of a match, he looked upward, then lowered his eyes, only to glance up again, startled. Directly above his head, beyond the pipes, was a wealth of electric wiring. I'll be damned, he snickered.

He got an old dull knife from the chest and, seeing again with his fingers, separated the two strands of wire and cut away the insulation. Twice he received a slight shock. He scraped the wiring clean and managed to join the two twin-ends, then screwed in the bulb. The sudden illumination blinded him and he shut his lids to kill the pain in his eyeballs. I've got that much done, he thought jubilantly.

He placed the bulb on the dirt floor and the light cast a blatant glare on the bleak clay walls. Next he plugged one end of the wire that dangled from the radio into the light socket and bent down and switched on the button; almost at once there was the harsh sound of static, but no words or music. Why won't it work? he wondered. Had he damaged the mechanism in any way? Maybe it needed grounding? Yes. . . . He rummaged in the tool chest and found another length of wire, fastened it to the ground of the radio, and then tied the opposite end to a pipe. Rising and growing distinct, a slow strain of music entranced him with its measured sound. He sat upon the chest, deliriously happy.

Later he searched again in the chest and found a half-gallon can of glue; he opened it and smelt a sharp odor. Then he recalled that he had not even looked at the money. He took a wad of green bills and weighed it in his palm, then broke the seal and held one of the bills up to the light and studied it closely. *The United States of America will pay to the bearer on demand one hundred dollars,* he read in slow speech; then: *This note is legal tender for all debts public and private.* . . . He broke into a musing laugh, feeling that he was reading of the doings of people who lived on some far-off planet. He turned the wad over and saw on the other side of the bill a beautiful building with soaring columns and wide circular steps leading up to an imposing entrance. He had no desire whatever to count the money; it was what it stood for—the various currents of life swirling above ground—that captivated him. Next he opened the rolls of coins and let them slide from their paper wrappings to the ground; the bright, new gleaming pennies and nickels and dimes piled high at his feet, a glowing mound of shimmering copper and silver. He sifted them through his fingers, listening to their tinkle as they struck the conical heap.

Oh, yes! He had forgotten. He would now write his name on the typewriter. He inserted a piece of paper and poised his fingers to write. But what was his name? He stared, trying to remember. He stood and glared about the dirt cave, his name on the tip of his lips. But it would not come to him. Why was he here? Yes, he had been running away from the police. But why? His mind was blank. He bit his lips and sat again, feeling a vague terror. But why worry? He laughed, then pecked slowly: *itwasalonghotday*. He was determined to type the sentence without making any mistakes. How did one make capital letters? He experimented and luckily discovered how to lock the machine for capital letters and then shift it back to lower case. Next he discovered how to make spaces, then he wrote neatly and correctly: *It was a long hot day.* Just why he selected that sentence he did not know; it was merely the ritual of performing the thing that appealed to him. He took the sheet out of the machine and looked around with stiff neck and hard eyes and spoke to an imaginary person:

"Yes, I'll have the contracts ready tomorrow."

He laughed. That's just the way they talk, he said. He grew weary of the game and pushed the machine aside. His eyes fell upon the can of glue, and a mischievous idea bloomed in him, filling him with nervous eagerness. He leaped up and opened the can of glue, then broke the seals on all the wads of money. I'm going to have some wallpaper, he said with a luxurious, physical laugh that made him bend at the knees. He took the towel with which he had tied the sack and balled it into a swab and dipped it into the can of glue and dabbed glue onto the wall; then he pasted one green bill by the side of another. He stepped back and cocked his head. Jesus! That's funny. . . ! He slapped his thighs and guffawed. He had triumphed over the world above ground! He was free! If only people could see this! He wanted to run from this cave and yell his discovery to the world.

He swabbed all the dirt walls of the cave and pasted them with green bills; when he had finished the walls blazed with a yellow-green fire. Yes, this room would be his hideout; between him and the world that had branded him guilty would stand this mocking symbol. He had not stolen the money; he had simply picked it up, just as a man would pick up firewood in a forest. And that was how the world above ground now seemed to him, a wild forest filled with death.

The walls of money finally palled on him and he looked about for new interests to feed his emotions. The cleaver! He drove a nail into the wall and hung the bloody cleaver upon it. Still another idea welled up. He pried open the metal boxes and lined them side by side on the dirt floor. He grinned at the gold and fire. From one box he lifted up a fistful of ticking gold watches and dangled them by their gleaming chains. He stared with an idle smile, then began to wind them up; he did not attempt to set them at any given hour, for there was no time for him now. He took a fistful of nails and drove them into the papered walls and hung the watches upon them, letting them swing down by their glittering chains, trembling and ticking busily against the backdrop of green with the lemon sheen of the electric light shining upon the metal watch casings, converting the golden discs into blobs of liquid yellow. Hardly had he hung up the last watch than the idea extended itself; he took more nails from the chest and drove them into the green paper and took the boxes of rings and went from nail to nail and hung up the golden bands. The blue and white sparks from the stones filled the cave with brittle laughter, as though enjoying his hilarious secret. People certainly can do some funny things, he said to himself.

He sat upon the tool chest, alternately laughing and shaking his head soberly. Hours later he became conscious of the gun sagging at his hip and he pulled it from the holster. He had seen men fire guns in movies, but somehow his life had never led him into contact with firearms. A desire to feel the sensation others felt in firing came over him. But someone might hear. . . . Well, what if they did? They would not know where the shot had come from. Not in their wildest notions would they think that it had come from under the streets! He tightened his finger on the trigger; there was a deafening report and it seemed that the entire underground had caved in upon his eardrums; and in the same instant there flashed an orange-blue spurt of flame that died quickly but lingered on as a vivid after-image. He smelt the acrid stench of burnt powder filling his lungs and he dropped the gun abruptly.

The intensity of his feelings died and he hung the gun and cartridge belt upon the wall. Next he lifted the jars of diamonds and turned them bottom upwards, dumping the white pellets upon the ground. One by one he picked them up and peeled the tissue paper from them and piled them in a neat heap. He wiped his sweaty hands on his trousers, lit a cigarette, and commenced playing another game. He imagined that he was a rich man who lived above ground in the obscene sunshine and he was strolling through a park of a summer morning, smiling, nodding to his neighbors, sucking an after-breakfast cigar. Many times he crossed the floor of the cave, avoiding the diamonds with his feet, yet subtly gauging his footsteps so that his shoes, wet with sewer slime, would strike the diamonds at some undetermined moment. After twenty minutes of sauntering his right foot smashed into the heap and diamonds lay scattered in all directions, glinting with a million tiny chuckles of icy laughter. Oh, shucks, he mumbled in mock regret, intrigued by the damage he had wrought. He continued walking, ignoring the brittle fire. He felt that he had a glorious victory locked in his heart.

He stooped and flung the diamonds more evenly over the floor and they showered rich sparks, collaborating with him. He went over the floor and trampled the stones just deep enough for them to be faintly visible, as though they were set delicately in the prongs of a thousand rings. A ghostly light bathed the cave. He sat on the chest and frowned. Maybe *any*thing's right, he mumbled. Yes, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, any act a man took to satisfy himself, murder, theft, torture. . . .

He straightened with a start. What was happening to him? He was drawn to these crazy thoughts, yet they made him feel vaguely guilty. He would stretch out upon the ground, then get up; he would want to crawl again through the holes he had dug, but would restrain himself; he would think of going again up into the streets, but fear would hold him still. He stood in the middle of the cave, surrounded by green walls and a laughing floor, trembling. He was going to do something, but what? Yes, he was afraid of himself, afraid of doing some nameless thing.

To control himself, he turned on the radio. A melancholy piece of music rose. Brooding over the diamonds on the floor was like looking up into a sky full of restless stars; then the illusion turned into its opposite: He was high up in the air looking down at the twinkling lights of a sprawling city The music ended and a man recited news events. In the same attitude in which he had contemplated the city, so now, as he heard the cultivated tone, he looked down upon land and sea as men fought, as cities were razed, as planes scattered death upon open towns, as long lines of trenches wavered and broke. He heard the names of generals and the names of mountains and the names of countries and the names and numbers of divisions that were in action on different battle fronts. He saw black smoke billowing from the stacks of warships as they neared each other over wastes of water and he heard their huge guns thunder as red-hot shells screamed across the surface of night seas. He saw hundreds of planes wheeling and droning in the sky and heard the clatter of machine-guns as they fought each other and he saw planes falling in plume of smoke and blaze of fire. He saw steel tanks rumbling across fields of ripe wheat to meet other tanks and there was a loud clang of steel as numberless tanks collided. He saw troops with fixed bayonets charging in waves against other troops who held fixed bayonets and men groaned as steel ripped into their bodies and they went down to die. . . . The voice of the radio faded and he was staring at the diamonds on the floor at his feet.

He shut off the radio, fighting an irrational compulsion to act. He walked aimlessly about the cave, touching the walls with his fingertips. Suddenly he stood still. *What was the matter with him?* Yes, he knew. . . . It was these walls; these crazy walls were filling him with a wild urge to climb out into the dark sunshine above ground. Quickly he doused the light to banish the shouting walls, then sat again upon the tool chest. Yes, he was trapped. His muscles were flexed taut and sweat ran down his face. He knew now that he could not stay here and he could not go out. He lit a cigarette with shaking fingers; the match flame revealed the green-papered walls with militant distinctness; the purple on the gun barrel glinted like a threat; the meat cleaver brooded with its eloquent splotches of blood; the mound of silver and copper smoldered angrily; the diamonds winked at him from the floor; and the gold watches ticked and trembled, crowning time the king of consciousness, defining the limits of living. . . . The match blaze died and he bolted from where he stood and collided brutally with the nails upon the walls. The spell was broken. He shuddered, feeling that, in spite of his fear, sooner or later he would go up into that dead sunshine and somehow say something to somebody about all this.

He sat again upon the tool chest. Fatigue weighed upon his forehead and eyes. Minutes passed and he relaxed. He dozed, but his imagination was alert. He saw himself rising, wading again in the sweeping water of the sewer; he came to a manhole and climbed out and was amazed to discover that he had hoisted himself into a room filled with armed policemen who were watching him intently. He jumped awake in the dark; he had not moved. He sighed, closed his eyes and slept again; this time his imagination designed a scheme of protection for him. His dreaming made him feel that he was standing in a room watching over his own nude body lying stiff and cold upon a white table. At the far end of the room he saw a crowd of people huddled in a corner, afraid of his body. Though lying dead upon the table, he was standing in some mysterious way at his side, warding off the people, guarding his body and laughing to himself as he observed the situation. They're scared of me, he thought.

He awakened with a start, leaped to his feet, and stood in the center of the black cave. It was a full minute before he moved again. He hovered between sleeping and waking, unprotected, a prey of wild fears. He could neither see nor hear. One part of him was asleep; his blood coursed slowly and his flesh was numb. On the other hand he was roused to a strange, high pitch of tension. He lifted his fingers to his face, as though about to weep. Gradually his hands lowered and he struck a match, looking about, expecting to see a door through which he could walk to safety; but there was no door, only the green walls and the moving floor. The match flame died and it was dark again.

Five minutes later he was still standing when the thought came to him that he had been asleep. Yes. . . . But he was not yet fully awake; he was still queerly blind and deaf. How long had he slept? Where was he? Then suddenly he recalled the green-papered walls of the cave and in the same instant he heard loud singing coming from the church beyond the wall. Yes, they woke me up, he muttered. He hoisted himself and lay atop the bed of pipes and brought his face to the narrow slit. Men and women stood here and there between pews. A song ended and a young black girl tossed back her head and closed her eyes and broke plaintively into another hymn:

Glad, glad, glad, oh, so glad
I got Jesus in my soul . . .

Those few words were all she sang, but what her words did not say, her emotions said as she repeated the lines, varying the mood and tempo, making her tone express meanings which her conscious mind did not know. Another woman melted her voice with the girl's, and then an old man's voice merged with that of the two women. Soon the entire congregation was singing:

Glad, glad, glad, oh, so glad
I got Jesus in my soul . . .

They're wrong, he whispered in the lyric darkness. He felt that their search for a happiness they could never find made them feel that they had committed some dreadful offense which they could not remember or understand. He was now in possession of the feeling that had gripped him when he had first come into the underground. It came to him in a series of questions: why was this sense of guilt so seemingly innate, so easy to come by, to think, to feel, so verily physical? It seemed that when one felt this guilt one was retracing in one's feelings a faint pattern designed long before; it seemed that one was always trying to remember a gigantic shock that had left a haunting impression upon one's body which one could not forget or shake off, but which had been forgotten by the conscious mind, creating in one's life a state of eternal anxiety.

He had to tear himself away from this; he got down from the pipes. His nerves were so taut that he seemed to feel his brain pushing through his skull. He felt that he had to do something, but he could not figure out what it was. Yet he knew that if he stood here until he made up his mind, he would never move. He crawled through the hole he had made in the brick wall and the exertion afforded him respite from tension. When he entered the basement of the radio store, he stopped in fear, hearing loud voices.

"Come on, boy! Tell us what you did with the radio!"

"Mister, I didn't steal the radio! I swear. . . ."

He heard a dull thumping sound and he imagined a boy being struck violently.

"Please, mister. . . ."

"Did you take it to a pawn shop?"

"No, sir! I didn't steal the radio! I got a radio at home," the boy's voice pleaded hysterically. "Go to my home and look!"

There came to his ears the sound of another blow. It was so funny that he had to clap his hand over his mouth to keep from laughing out loud. They're beating some poor boy, he whispered to himself, shaking his head. He felt a sort of distant pity for the boy and wondered if he ought to bring back the radio and leave it in the basement. No. Perhaps it was a good thing that they were beating the boy; perhaps the beating would bring to the boy's attention, for the first time in his life, the secret of his existence, the guilt that he could never be rid of.

Smiling, he scampered over a coal pile and stood again in the basement of the building where he had stolen the money and jewelry. He lifted himself into the areaway, climbed the rainpipe and squinted through a two-inch opening of window. The guilty familiarity of what he saw made his muscles tighten. Framed before him in a bright tableau of daylight was the night watchman sitting upon the edge of a chair, stripped to the waist, his head sagging forward his eyes red and puffy. The watchman's face and shoulders were stippled with red and black welts. Back of the watchman stood the safe, the steel door wide open showing the empty vault. Yes, they think he did it, he mused.

Footsteps sounded in the room and a man in a blue suit passed in front of him, then another, then still another. Policemen, he breathed. Yes, they were trying to make the watchman confess, just as they had once made him confess to a crime he had not done. He stared hard into the room, trying to recall something. Oh. . . . Those were the same policemen who had beaten him, had made him sign that paper when he had been too tired and sick to care. Now, they were doing the same thing to the watchman. His heart pounded as he saw one of the policemen shake a finger into the watchman's face.

"Why don't you admit it's an inside job, Thompson?" the police said.

"I've told you all I know," the watchman mumbled through swollen lips.

"But nobody was here but you!" the policeman shouted.

"I was sleeping," the watchman said. "It was wrong, but I was sleeping all that night. . . ."

"Stop telling us that lie!"

"It's the truth!"

"When did you get the combination?"

"I don't know how to open the safe," the watchman said.

He clung to the rainpipe, tense; he wanted to laugh, but he controlled himself. He felt a great sense of power; yes, he could go back to the cave, rip the money off the walls, pick up the diamonds and rings, and bring them here and write a note, telling them where to look for their foolish toys.

No . . . What good would that do? It was not worth the effort. The watchman was guilty; although he was not guilty of the crime of which he had been accused, he was guilty, had always been guilty. The only thing that worried him was that the man who had been really stealing was not being accused. But he consoled himself: They'll catch him sometime during his life . . .

He saw one of the policemen slap the watchman across the mouth.

"Come clean, you bastard!"

"I've told you all I know," the watchman mumbled like a child.

One of the police went to the rear of the watchman's chair and jerked it from under him; the watchman pitched forward upon his face.

"Get up!" a policeman said.

Trembling, the watchman pulled himself up and sat limply again in the chair.

"Now, are you going to talk?"

"I've told you all I know," the watchman gasped.

"Where did you hide the stuff?"

"I didn't take it. . . ."

"Thompson, your brains are in your feet," one of the policemen said. "We're going to string you up and get them back into your skull."

He watched the policemen clamp handcuffs on the watchman's wrists and ankles; then they lifted the watchman and swung him upside-down and hoisted his feet to the edge of a door. The watchman hung, head down, his eyes bulging. They're crazy, he whispered to himself as he clung to the ridges of the pipe.

"You going to talk?" a policeman shouted into the watchman's ear.

He heard the watchman groan.

"We'll let you hang there till you talk, see?"

He saw the watchman close his eyes.

"Let's take 'im down. He passed out," a policeman said.

He grinned as he watched them take the body down and dump it carelessly upon the floor. The policemen took off the handcuffs.

"Let 'im come to. Let's get a smoke," a policeman said.

The three policemen left the scope of his vision. A door slammed. He had an impulse to yell to the watchman that he could escape through the hole in the basement and live with him in the cave. But he wouldn't understand, he told himself. After a moment he saw the watchman rise and stand, swaying from weakness. He stumbled across the room to a desk, opened a drawer, and took out a gun. He's going to kill himself, he thought, intent, eager, detached, yearning to see the end of the man's actions. As the watchman stared vaguely about he lifted the gun to his temple; he stood like that for some minutes, biting his lips until a line of blood etched its way down a corner of his chin. No, he oughtn't do that, he said to himself in a mood of pity.

"Don't!" he half whispered and half yelled.

The watchman looked wildly about; he had heard him. But it did not help; there was a loud report and the watchman's head jerked violently and he fell like a log and lay prone, the gun clattering over the floor.

The three policemen came running into the room with drawn guns. One of the policemen knelt and rolled the watchman's body over and stared at a ragged, scarlet hole in the temple.

"Our hunch was right," the kneeling policeman said. "He was guilty, all right."

"Well, this ends the case," another policeman said.

"He knew he was licked," the third one said with grim satisfaction.

He eased down the rainpipe, crawled back through the holes he had made and went back into his cave. A fever burned in his bones. He had to act, yet he was afraid. His eyes stared in the darkness as though propped open by invisible hands, as though they had become lidless. His muscles were rigid and he stood for what seemed to him a thousand years.

❦

When he moved again his actions were informed with precision, his muscular system reinforced from a reservoir of energy. He crawled through the hole of earth, dropped into the grey sewer current and sloshed ahead. When his right foot went forward at a street intersection, he fell backwards and shot down into water. In a spasm of terror his right hand grabbed the concrete ledge of a down-curve and he felt the streaking water tugging violently at his body. The current reached his neck and for a moment he was still. He knew that if he moved clumsily he would be sucked under. He held onto the ledge with both hands and slowly pulled himself up. He sighed, standing once more in the sweeping water, thankful that he had missed death.

He waded on through sludge, moving with care, until he came to a web of light sifting down from a manhole cover. He saw steel hooks running up the side of the sewer wall; he caught hold and lifted himself and put his shoulder to the cover and moved it an inch. A crash of sound came to him as he looked into a hot glare of sunshine through which blurred shapes moved. Fear scalded him and he dropped back into the pallid current and stood paralyzed in the shadows. A heavy car rumbled past overhead, jarring the pavement, warning him to stay in his world of dark light, knocking the cover back into place with an imperious clang.

He did not know how much fear he felt, for fear claimed him completely; yet it was not a fear of the police or people, but a cold dread at the thought of the actions he knew he would perform if he went out into that cruel sunshine. His mind said no; his body said yes; and his mind could not understand his feelings. A low whine broke from him and he was in the act of uncoiling. He climbed upward and heard the faint honking of auto horns. Like a frantic cat clutching a rag, he clung to the steel prongs and heaved his shoulder against the cover and pushed it off half-way. For a split second his eyes were drowned in the terror of yellow light and he was in a deeper darkness than he had ever known in the underground.

Partly out of the hole, he blinked, regaining enough sight to make out meaningful forms. An odd thing was happening: No one was rushing forward to challenge him. He had imagined the moment of his emergence as a desperate tussle with men who wanted to cart him off to be killed; instead, life froze about him as the traffic stopped. He pushed the cover aside, stood, swaying in a world so fragile that he expected it to collapse and drop him into some deep void. But nobody seemed to pay him heed. The cars were now swerving to shun him and the gaping hole.

"Why in hell don't you put up a red light, dummy?" a raucous voice yelled.

He understood; they thought that he was a sewer workman. He walked toward the sidewalk, weaving unsteadily through the moving traffic.

"Look where you're going, nigger!"

"That's right! Stay there and get killed!"

"You blind, you bastard?"

"Go home and sleep your drunk off!"

A policeman stood at the curb, looking in the opposite direction. When he passed the policeman, he feared that he would be grabbed, but nothing happened. Where was he? Was this real? He wanted to look about to get his bearings, but felt that something awful would happen to him if he did. He wandered into a spacious doorway of a store that sold men's clothing and saw his reflection in a long mirror: his cheekbones protruded from a hairy black face; his greasy cap was perched askew upon his head and his eyes were red and glassy. His shirt and trousers were caked with mud and hung loosely. His hands were gummed with a black stickiness. He threw back his head and laughed so loudly that passers-by stopped and stared.

He ambled on down the sidewalk, not having the merest notion of where he was going. Yet, sleeping within him, was the drive to go somewhere and say something to somebody. Half an hour later his ears caught the sound of spirited singing.

The Lamb, the Lamb, the Lamb
I hear thy voice a-calling
The Lamb, the Lamb, the Lamb
I feel thy grace a-falling

A church! he exclaimed. He broke into a run and came to brick steps leading downward to a sub-basement. This is it! The church into which he had peered. Yes, he was going in and tell them. . . . What? He did not know; but, once face to face with them, he would think of what to say. Must be Sunday, he mused. He ran down the steps and jerked the door open; the church was crowded and a deluge of song swept over him.

The Lamb, the Lamb, the Lamb
Tell me again your story
The Lamb, the Lamb, the Lamb
Flood my soul with your glory

He stared at the singing faces with a trembling smile.

"Say!" he shouted.

Many turned to look at him, but the song rolled on. His arm was jerked violently.

"I'm sorry, Brother, but you can't do that in here," a man said.

"But, Mister . . ."

"You can't act rowdy in God's house," the man said.

"He's filthy," another man said.

"But I want to tell 'em, he said loudly.

"He stinks," someone muttered.

The song had stopped, but at once another one began.

Oh, wondrous sight upon the cross
Vision sweet and divine
Oh, wondrous sight upon the cross
Full of such love sublime

He attempted to twist away, but other hands grabbed him and rushed him into the doorway.

"Let me alone!" he screamed, struggling.

"Get out!"

"He's drunk," somebody said. "He ought to be ashamed!"

"He acts crazy!"

He felt that he was failing and he grew frantic.

"But, Mister, let me tell. . . ."

"Get away from this door, or I'll call the police!

He stared, his trembling smile fading in a sense of wonderment.

"The police," he repeated vacantly.

"Now, get!"

He was pushed toward the brick steps and the door banged shut. The waves of song came.

Oh, wondrous sight, wondrous sight
Lift my heavy heart above
Oh, wondrous sight, wondrous sight
Fill my weary soul with love

He was smiling again now. Yes, the police. . . . That was it! Why had he no thought of it before? The idea had been deep down in him, and only now did it assume supreme importance. He looked up and saw a street sign: COURT STREET—HARTSDALE AVENUE. He turned and walked northward, his mind filled with the image of the police station. Yes, that was where they had beaten him, accused him, and had made him sign a confession of his guilt. He would go there and clear up everything, make a statement. What statement? He did not know. He was the statement, and since it was all so clear to him, surely he would be able to make it clear to others.

He came to the corner of Hartsdale Avenue and turned westward. Yeah, there's the station. . . . A policeman came down the steps and walked past him without a glance. He mounted the stone steps and went through the door, paused; he was in a hallway where several policemen were standing, talking, smoking. One turned to him.

"What do you want, boy?"

He looked at the policeman and laughed.

"What in hell are you laughing about?" the policeman asked.

He stopped laughing and stared. His whole being was full of what he wanted to say to them, but he could not say it.

"Are you looking for the Desk Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir," he said quickly; then: "Oh, no, sir."

"Well, make up your mind, now."

Four policemen grouped themselves about him.

"I'm looking for the men," he said.

"What men?"

Peculiarly, at that moment he could not remember the names of the policemen; he recalled their beating him, the confession he had signed, and how he had run away from them. He saw the cave next to the church, the money on the walls, the guns, the rings, the cleaver, the watches, and the diamonds on the floor.

"They brought me here," he began.

"When?"

His mind flew back over the blur of time lived in the underground blackness. He had no idea of how much time had elapsed, but the intensity of what had happened to him told him that it could not have transpired in a short space of time, yet his mind told him that the time must have been brief.

"It was a long time ago," he spoke like a child relating a dimly remembered dream. "It was a long time," he repeated, following the promptings of his emotions. "They beat me. . . . I was scared. . . . I ran away. . . ."

A policeman raised a finger to his temple and made a derisive circle.

"Nuts," the policeman said.

"Do you know what place this is, boy?"

"Yes, sir. The police station," he answered sturdily, almost proudly.

"Well, who do you want to see?"

"The men," he said again, feeling that surely they knew the men. "You know the men," he said in a hurt tone.

"What's your name?"

He opened his lips to answer and no words came. He had forgotten. But what did it matter if he had? It was not important.

"Where do you live?"

Where did he live? It had been so long ago since he had lived up here in this strange world that he felt it was foolish even to try to remember. Then for a moment the old mood that had dominated him in the underground surged back. He leaned forward and spoke eagerly.

"They said I killed the woman. . . ."

"What woman?" a policeman asked.

"And I signed a paper that said I was guilty," he went on, ignoring their questions. "Then I ran off. . . .

"Did you run off from an institution?"

"No, sir," he said, blinking and shaking his head. "I came from under the ground. I pushed off the manhole cover and climbed out. . . ."

"All right, now," a policeman said, placing an arm about his shoulder. "We'll send you to the psycho and you'll be taken care of."

"Maybe he's a Fifth Columnist!" a policeman shouted.

There was laughter and, despite his anxiety, he joined in. But the laughter lasted so long that it irked him.

"I got to find those men," he protested mildly.

"Say, boy, what have you been drinking?"

"Water," he said. "I got some water in a basement."

"Were the men you ran away from dressed in white, boy?"

"No, sir," he said brightly. "They were men like you."

An elderly policeman caught hold of his arm.

"Try and think hard. Where did they pick you up?"

He knitted his brows in an effort to remember, but he was blank inside. The policemen stood before him demanding logical answers and he could no longer think with his mind; he thought with his feelings and no words came.

"I was guilty," he said. "Oh, no, sir. I wasn't then, I mean, mister. . . ."

"Aw, talk sense. Now, where did they pick you up?"

He felt challenged and his mind began reconstructing events in reverse: his feelings ranged back over the long hours and he saw the cave, the sewer, the bloody room where it was said that a woman had been killed. . . .

"Oh, yes, sir," he said, smiling. "I was coming from Mrs. Wooten's . . ."

"Who is she?"

"I work for her."

"Where does she live?"

"Next door to Mrs. Peabody, the woman who was killed."

The policemen were very quiet now, looking at him intently.

"What do you know about Mrs. Peabody's death, boy?"

"Nothing, sir. But they said I killed her. But it doesn't make any difference. I'm guilty. . . ."

"What are you talking about, boy?"

His smile faded and he was possessed with memories of the underground; he saw the cave next to the church and his lips moved to speak. But how could he say it? The distance between what he felt and what these men meant was vast. Something told him, as he stood there looking into their faces, that he would never be able to tell them, that they would never believe him even if he told them.

"All the people I saw was guilty," he began slowly.

"Aw, nuts," a policeman muttered.

"Say," another policeman said, "that Peabody woman was killed over on Winewood. That's Number Ten's beat."

"Where's Number Ten?" a policeman asked.

"Upstairs in the swing-room," someone answered.

"Take this boy up, Sam," a policeman ordered.

"Okay. Come along, boy."

An elderly policeman caught hold of his arm and led him up a flight of wooden stairs, down a long hall, and to a door.

"Squad Ten!" the policeman called through the door.

"What?" a gruff voice answered.

"Someone to see you!"

"About what?"

The old policeman pushed the door in and then shoved him into the room.

He stared, his lips open, his heart barely beating. Before him were the three policemen who had picked him up and had beaten him to extract the confession. They were seated about a small table, playing cards. The air was blue with smoke and sunshine poured through a high window, lighting up fantastic smoke-shapes. He saw one of the policemen look up; the policeman's face was tired and a cigarette drooped limply from one corner of his mouth and both of his fat, puffy eyes were squinting and his hands gripped his cards.

"Lawson!" the man exclaimed.

The moment the man's name sounded he remembered the names of all of them: Lawson, Murphy, and Johnson. How simple it was! He waited, smiling, wondering how they would react when they knew that he had come back.

"Looking for me?" the man who had been called Lawson mumbled, sorting his cards. "For what?"

So far only Murphy, the red-headed one, had recognized him.

"Don't you-all remember me?" he blurted, running to the table.

All three of the policemen were looking at him now. Lawson, who seemed the leader, jumped to his feet.

"Where in hell have you been?"

"Do you know 'im, Lawson?" the old policeman asked.

"Huh?" Lawson frowned. "Oh, yes. I'll handle 'im." The old policeman left the room and Lawson crossed to the door and turned the key in the lock. "Come here, boy," he ordered in a cold tone.

He did not move; he looked from face to face. Yes, he would tell them about his cave.

"He looks batty to me," Johnson said, the one who had not spoken before.

"Why in hell did you come back here?" Lawson asked.

"I—I just didn't want to run away no more," he said. "I'm all right, now. . . ." He paused; the men's attitude puzzled him.

"You've been hiding, huh?" Lawson asked in a tone that denoted that he had not heard his previous words. "You told us you were sick, and when we left you in the room, you jumped out of the window and ran away. . . ."

Panic filled him. Yes, they were indifferent to what he would say! They were waiting for him to speak and they would laugh at him. He had to rescue himself from this bog; he had to force the reality of himself upon them.

"Mister, I took a sackful of money and pasted it on the walls. . . ." he began.

"I'll be damned," Lawson said.

"Listen," said Murphy, "let me tell you something for your own good. We don't want you, see? You're free, free as air. Now go home and forget about it. It was all a mistake. We caught the guy who did the Peabody job. He wasn't colored at all. He was an Eyetalian. . . ."

"Shut up!" Lawson yelled. "Have you no sense!"

"But I want to tell 'im," Murphy said.

"We can't let this crazy fool go," Lawson exploded. "He acts nuts, but this may be a stunt. . . ."

"I was down in a basement," he began in a childlike tone, as though repeating a lesson learned by heart; "and I went into a movie. . . ." His voice failed. He was getting ahead of his story. First, he ought to tell them about the singing in the church, but what words could he use? He looked at them appealingly. "I went into a shop and took a sackful of money and diamonds and watches and rings. . . . I didn't steal 'em; I'll give 'em all back. I just took 'em to play with. . . ." He paused, stunned by their disbelieving eyes.

Lawson lit a cigarette and looked at him coldly.

"What did you do with the money?" he asked in a quiet, waiting voice.

"I pasted the hundred-dollar bills on the walls. . . ."

"What walls?" Lawson asked.

"The walls of the dirt room," he said, smiling, "the room next to the church. I hung up the rings and the watches and I stamped the diamonds into the dirt. . . ." He saw that they were not understanding what he was saying. He grew frantic to make them believe, his voice tumbled on eagerly. "I saw a dead baby and a dead man. . . ."

"Aw, you're nuts," Lawson snarled, shoving him into a chair.

"But, mister. . . ."

"Johnson, where's the paper he signed?" Lawson asked.

"What paper?"

"The confession, fool!"

Johnson pulled out his billfold and extracted a crumpled piece of paper.

"Yes, sir, mister," he said, stretching forth his hand. "That's the paper I signed. . . ."

Lawson slapped him and he would have toppled had his chair not struck a wall behind him. Lawson scratched a match and held the paper over the flame; the confession burned down to Lawson's fingertips.

He stared, thunderstruck; the sun of the underground was fleeing and the terrible darkness of the day stood before him. They did not believe him, but he *had* to make them believe him!

"But, mister. . . ."

"It's going to be all right, boy," Lawson said with a quiet, soothing laugh. "I've burned your confession, see? You didn't sign anything." Lawson came close to him with the black ashes cupped in his palm. "You don't remember a thing about this, do you?"

"Don't you—all be scared of me," he pleaded, sensing their uneasiness. "I'll sign another paper, if you want me to. I'll show you the cave. . . ."

"What's your game, boy?" Lawson asked suddenly.

"What are you trying to find out?" Johnson asked.

"Who sent you here?" Murphy demanded.

"Nobody sent me, mister," he said. "I just want to show you the room . . ."

"Aw, he's plumb bats," Murphy said. "Let's ship 'im to the psycho."

"No," Lawson said. "He's playing a game and I wish to God I knew what it was."

There flashed through his mind a definite way to make them believe him; he rose from the chair with nervous excitement.

"Mister, I saw the night watchman blow his brains out because you accused him of stealing," he told them. "But he didn't steal the money and diamonds . . . I took 'em."

Tigerishly Lawson grabbed his collar and lifted him bodily.

"Who told you about that?"

"Don't get excited, Lawson," Johnson said. "He read about it in the papers."

Lawson flung him away.

"He couldn't have," Lawson said, pulling papers from his pocket. "I haven't turned in the reports yet."

"Then how *did* he find out?" Murphy asked.

"Let's get out of here," Lawson said with quick resolution. "Listen, boy, we're going to take you to a nice, quiet place, see?"

"Yes, sir," he said. "And I'll show you the underground."

"Goddamn," Lawson muttered, fastening his gun at his hip. He narrowed his eyes at Johnson and Murphy. "Listen," he spoke just above a whisper, "say nothing about this, you hear?"

"Okay," Johnson said.

"Sure," Murphy said.

Lawson unlocked the door and Johnson and Murphy led him down the stairs. The hallway was crowded with policemen.

"What have you got there, Lawson?"

"What did he do, Lawson?"

"He's psycho, ain't he, Lawson?"

Lawson did not answer; Johnson and Murphy led him to the car parked at the curb, pushed him into the back seat. Lawson got behind the steering wheel and the car rolled forward.

"What's up, Lawson?" Murphy asked.

"Listen," Lawson began slowly, "we tell the papers that he spilled about the Peabody job, then he escapes. The Wop is caught and we tell the papers that we steered them wrong to trap the real guy, see? Now this dope shows up and acts nuts. If we let him go, he'll squeal that we framed him, see?"

"I'm all right, mister," he said, feeling Murphy's and Johnson's arm locked rigidly into his. "I'm guilty. . . . I'll show you everything in the underground. I laughed and laughed. . . ."

"Shut that fool up!" Lawson ordered.

Johnson tapped him across the head with a blackjack and he fell back against the seat cushion, dazed.

"Yes, sir," he mumbled. "I'm all right."

The car sped along Hartsdale Avenue, then swung onto Pine Street and rolled to State Street, then turned south. It slowed to a stop, turned in the middle of a block and headed north again.

"You're going around in circles, Lawson," Murphy said.

Lawson did not answer; he was hunched over the steering wheel. Finally he pulled the car to a stop at a curb.

"Say, boy, tell us the truth," Lawson asked quietly. "Where did you hide?"

"I didn't hide, mister."

The three policemen were staring at him now; he felt that for the first time they were willing to understand him.

"Then what happened?"

"Mister, when I looked through all of those holes and saw how people were living, I loved 'em. . . ."

"Cut out that crazy talk!" Lawson snapped. "Who sent you back here?"

"Nobody, mister."

"Maybe he's talking straight," Johnson ventured.

"All right," Lawson said. "Nobody hid you. Now, tell us *where* you hid."

"I went underground. . . ."

"What goddamn underground do you keep talking about?"

"I just went. . . ." He paused and look into the street, then pointed to a manhole cover. "I went down in there and stayed."

"In the *sewer?*"

"Yes, sir."

The policemen burst into a sudden laugh and ended quickly. Lawson swung the car around and drove to Woodside Avenue; he brought the car to a stop in front of a tall apartment building.

"What're we going to do, Lawson?" Murphy asked.

"I'm taking him up to my place," Lawson said. "We've got to wait until night. There's nothing we can do now."

They took him out of the car and led him into a vestibule.

"Take the steps," Lawson muttered.

They led him up four flights of stairs and into the living room of a small apartment. Johnson and Murphy let go of his arms and he stood uncertainly in the middle of the room.

"Now, listen, boy," Lawson began, "forget those wild lies you've been telling us. Where did you hide?"

"I just went underground, like I told you."

The room rocked with laughter. Lawson went to a cabinet and got a bottle of whiskey; he placed glasses for Johnson and Murphy. The three of them drank.

He felt that he could not explain himself to them. He tried to muster all the sprawling images that floated in him; the images stood out sharply in his mind, but he could not make them have the meaning for others that they had for him. He felt so helpless that he began to cry.

"He's nuts, all right," Johnson said. "All nuts cry like that."

Murphy crossed the room and slapped him.

"Stop that raving!"

A sense of excitement flooded him; he ran to Murphy and grabbed his arm.

"Let me show you the cave," he said. "Come on, and you'll see!"

Before he knew it a sharp blow had clipped him on the chin; darkness covered his eyes. He dimly felt himself being lifted and laid out on the sofa. He heard low voices and struggled to rise, but hard hands held him down. His brain was clearing now. He pulled to a sitting posture and stared with glazed eyes. It had grown dark. How long had he been out?

"Say, boy," Lawson said soothingly, "will you show us the underground?"

His eyes shone and his heart swelled with gratitude. Lawson believed him! He rose, glad; he grabbed Lawson's arm, making the policeman spill whiskey from the glass to his shirt.

"Take it easy, goddammit," Lawson said.

"Yes, sir."

"Okay. We'll take you down. But you'd better be telling us the truth, you hear?"

He clapped his hands in wild joy.

"I'll show you everything!"

He had triumphed at last! He would now do what he had felt was compelling him all along. At last he would be free of his burden.

"Take 'im down," Lawson ordered.

They led him down into the vestibule; when he reached the sidewalk he saw that it was night and a fine rain was falling.

"It's just like when I went down," he told them.

"What?" Lawson asked.

"The rain," he said, sweeping his arm in a wide arc. "It was raining when I went down. The rain made the water rise and lift the cover off. . . ."

"Cut it out," Lawson snapped.

They did not believe him now, but they would. A mood of high selflessness throbbed in him. He could barely contain his rising spirits. They would see what he had seen; they would feel what he had felt. He would lead them through all the holes he had dug and . . . He wanted to make a hymn, prance about in physical ecstasy, throw his arms about the policemen in fellowship.

"Get into the car," Lawson ordered.

He climbed in and Johnson and Murphy sat at either side of him; Lawson slid behind the steering wheel and started the motor.

"Now, tell us where to go," Lawson said.

"It's right around the corner from where the lady was killed," he said.

The car rolled slowly and he closed his eyes, remembering the song he had heard in the church, the song that had wrought him to such a high pitch of terror and pity. He sang softly, lolling his head:

Glad, glad, glad, oh, so glad
I got Jesus in my soul . . .

"Mister," he said, stopping his song, "you ought to see how funny the rings look on the wall." He giggled. "I fired a pistol, too. Just once, to see how it felt. . . ."

"What do you suppose he's suffering from?" Johnson asked.

"Delusions of grandeur, maybe," Murphy said.

"Maybe it's because he lives in a white man's world," Lawson said.

"Say, boy, what did you eat down there?" Murphy asked, prodding Johnson anticipatorily with his elbow.

"Pears, oranges, bananas, and pork chops," he said.

The car filled with laughter.

"You didn't eat any watermelon?" Lawson asked, smiling.

"No, sir," he answered calmly. "I didn't see any."

The three policemen roared harder and louder.

"Boy, you're sure some case," Murphy said, shaking his head in wonder.

The car pulled to a curb.

"All right, boy," Lawson said. "Tell us where to go."

He peered through the rain and saw where he had gone down. The streets, save for a few dim lamps glowing softly through the rain, were dark and empty.

"Right there, mister," he said, pointing.

"Come on; let's take a look," Lawson said.

"Well, suppose he did hide down there," Johnson said, "what is that supposed to prove?"

"I don't believe he hid down there," Murphy said.

"It won't hurt to look," Lawson said. "Leave things to me."

Lawson got out of the car and looked up and down the street.

He was eager to show them the cave now. If he could show them what he had seen, then they would feel what he had felt and they in turn would show it to others and those others would feel as they had felt, and soon everybody would be governed by the same impulse of pity.

"Take 'im out," Lawson ordered.

Johnson and Murphy opened the door and pushed him out; he stood trembling in the rain, smiling. Again Lawson looked up and down the street; no one was in sight. The rain came down hard, slanting like black wires across the wind-swept air.

"All right," Lawson said. "Show us."

He walked to the center of the street, stopped and inserted a finger in one of the tiny holes of the cover and tugged, but he was too weak to budge it.

"Did you really go down in there, boy?" Lawson asked; there was a doubt in his voice.

"Yes, sir. Just a minute. I'll show you."

"Help 'im get that damn thing off," Lawson said.

Johnson stepped forward and lifted the cover; it clanged against the wet pavement. The hole gaped round and black.

"I went down in there," he announced with pride.

Lawson gazed at him for a long time without speaking, then he reached his right hand to his holster and drew his gun.

"Mister, I got a gun just like that down there," he said, laughing and looking into Lawson's face. "I fired it once then hung it on the wall. . . . I'll show you."

"Show us how you went down," Lawson said quietly.

"I'll go down first, mister, and then you-all can come after me, hear?" he spoke like a little boy playing a game.

"Sure, sure," Lawson said soothingly. "Go ahead. We'll come."

He looked brightly at the policemen; he was bursting with happiness. He bent down and placed his hands on the rim of the hole and sat on the edge, his feet dangling into watery darkness. He heard the familiar drone of the grey current. He lowered his body and hung for a moment by his fingers, then he went downward on the steel prongs, hand over hand, until he reached the last rung. He dropped and his feet hit the water and he felt the stiff current trying to suck him away. He balanced himself quickly and looked back upward at the policemen.

"Come on, you-all!" he yelled, casting his voice above the rustling at his feet.

The vague forms that towered above him in the rain did not move. He laughed, feeling that they doubted him. But, once they saw the things he had done, they would never doubt again.

"Come on! The cave isn't far!" he yelled. "But be careful when your feet hit the water, because the current's pretty rough down here!"

Lawson still held the gun. Murphy and Johnson looked at Lawson quizzically.

"What are we going to do, Lawson?" Murphy asked.

"We are not going to follow that crazy nigger down into that sewer, are we?" Johnson asked.

"Come on, you-all!" he begged in a shout.

He saw Lawson raise the gun and point it directly at him. Lawson's face twitched, as though he were hesitating.

Then there was a thunderous report and a streak of fire ripped through his chest. He was hurled into the water, flat on his back. He looked in amazement at the blurred white faces looming above him. They shot me, he said to himself. The water flowed past him, blossoming in foam about his arms, his legs, and his head. His jaw sagged and his mouth gaped soundless. A vast pain gripped his head and gradually squeezed out consciousness. As from a great distance he heard hollow voices.

"What did you shoot him for, Lawson?"

"I had to."

"Why?"

"You've got to shoot his kind. They'd wreck things."

As though in a deep dream, he heard a metallic clank; they had replaced the manhole cover, shutting out forever the sound of wind and rain. From overhead came the muffled roar of a powerful motor and the swish of a speeding car. He felt the strong tide pushing him slowly into the middle of the sewer, turning him about. For a split second there hovered before his eyes the glittering cave, the shouting walls and the laughing floor. . . . Then his mouth was full of thick, bitter water. The current spun him around. He sighed and closed his eyes, a whirling object rushing alone in the darkness, veering, tossing, lost in the heart of the earth.

BRENDAN GILL

More Like Home

Edward had finished shaving for the second time that day when Mrs. Neely brought the package to his room. "You're bleeding," she said.

Edward glanced at his image in the narrow mirror. He had already rubbed a styptic pencil over the little half-moon of blood which marked his upper lip. The cut annoyed him because Helen, seeing it, would guess that he had taken special pains to make himself presentable. He had cut himself often in the old days. Once, he remembered, Helen had kissed the faint white scar of such a cut, and they had laughed together to keep from feeling anything more than wonder. Edward said sharply, "You can leave the package on the bed."

"You black Irish," Mrs. Neely said, "ought to know better than to go slashing the crop the good Lord gave you. You'd have the fine long beard inside a week. Poor Neely, God have mercy on his soul—"

"On the bed," Edward repeated.

"—shaved and powdered and powdered and shaved," Mrs. Neely went on, "and he looked as black as a pot till the day he died." Mrs. Neely rested the package on the broad shelf of her hip. She was an old woman with gray hair and the round blue eyes of a girl. Unlike Edward's mother, she described without embarrassment matters of which Edward, though a priest, was only vaguely aware. "It was John Murray who laid him out, and I said to him, 'John,' I said, 'spend no time prettying Neely's face.' I meant with the rouge, the way they do. 'Leave him look as he does, so his friends will know him,' I said, and that's what Murray did." Mrs. Neely finished the account abruptly. She had begun by smiling at the memory of her late husband, but now she added "We had a fine time, Neely and me, a grand time. He was always a good provider."

Edward held a corner of his handkerchief against his lip until the blood clotted. Hearing in Mrs. Neely's voice the threat of approaching tears, he felt himself stiffening and drawing away from her. Though his lack of charity was followed, as usual, by a rush of shame, he could never bridge this gap of his own making. He saw by the cheap clock on the bureau that it was after seven. "If there should be any calls for me," he said, "I'll be back by ten."

"Yes, and I'm to be sure to get the addresses," Mrs. Neely said, the dangerous corner of reminiscence passed. "Don't give me that again." Since Mrs. Neely regarded the telephone, like sickness and liquor, as a natural enemy, she felt no responsibility for what she set down after a skirmish with it. Her notes were studies in condensation. "Mrs. Mulvill calld," she would write. "Tims been takn worse. Lex. Ave. sub. Not the Mlvls that own the beer plce," or, "Old lady Varey calld. Said she was dying. Said she must talk to Father. Told her to take slts." Mrs. Neely placed the package on the bed. "Don't go forgetting this. What'll be in it, do you suppose?"

Edward knew what was in the package. He had no intention of opening it in front of Mrs. Neely. In a postscript to the letter his mother had written urging him to visit Helen, she had added that she was forwarding a few old belongings, which she had saved for him since the day he left town for the seminary. She had written that she hoped they would make his room at the rectory seem more like home. Edward had frowned on first reading the letter and now, remembering it, he frowned again. Compared to the cells in which other priests had been satisfied to live and die, his room was luxurious. It held an enameled iron cot, two chairs and a small pine bureau. The floor of the room was covered by a green carpet and its single window, looking onto the church and the street, was furnished not only with shades, but with draperies of some white stuff which Mrs. Neely had washed to a gauzy thinness. Edward glanced at the dried blood on his handkerchief, folded the handkerchief and placed it in his pocket. He knew the kind of life he wanted. He had chosen it carefully. Yet for days he had been looking forward to opening the package. The more he thought of it, the more it had come to stand for everything he remembered of home. The package was, in a way, his first life, the lazy, friendly, happy-go-lucky life he had left behind. Going to the door, Edward said, "I'll open the package later. There's nothing important in it."

Since Mrs. Neely took a childish delight in surprises, her face shrank with disappointment. She followed Edward silently down the stairs and stood kneading her apron while Edward put on his black Homburg hat. She said, "Stop in at the kitchen when you come back. I think I'll be baking myself a cake." She hesitated, "I always bake me a cake when I feel like this. Takes me out of myself. A chocolate layer cake," she said, "with chopped walnuts. Fresh from the oven."

Edward said, "It sounds fine. But don't wait up on my account." He walked down the worn brownstone steps and along the street. A faint May wind spun the dust in the gutters, and in the sky between the buildings the first stars were winking into light. Nearly every entry and stoop was crowded with men and women enjoying the night air, and children ran along the curbs in their new summer sneakers. The men and women called, "Good evening, Father," and Mrs. Barbieri, who ran the fruit store, insisted on his taking a ripe peach. "Sweet," she said, kissing her pursed blunt fingers, "sweet like this."

"All right," Edward said, and rolled the peach awkwardly between his hands. "Thank you." Walking on, he caught sight of Margaret Daley standing in a corner doorway. The parish gossip, relayed by Mrs. Neely over Edward's protest while she served him his meals, was that Margaret was no better than she should be. Before the war, Margaret had been going steady with Joe Hagerty, whose mother had come to Edward for help in breaking up what she called, "that awful relationship, Father, the poor boy." Edward had consented to speak to Margaret, but up to now he had never found a suitable opportunity. After all, Joe was no baby. He said softly, "Good evening, Margaret," and she answered, 'Evening, Father."

For the first time, Edward noticed how pretty Margaret was and how her fine yellow hair seemed to hold the last of the daylight. He said, "What do you hear from Joe? Have they shipped him out of the country yet?"

Margaret shook her head. "He's coming home tonight, on his last leave before sailing. I have to—I'm waiting for him here." Her voice trembled. "He doesn't want his mother to know. He acts like a child about it. And he's in the Army. He's going across."

Knowing that he should be able to take advantage of this meeting, Edward said, "Yes, I see." The words, "caution" and "danger," rose and caught in his throat. He said, "Well, will you give Joe my best?"

Margaret nodded, her hair blowing over her eyes and cheeks. "I will, Father."

"I wish I were going myself, instead of Joe." He touched his right leg. "This has never got in my way yet; but to hear the military moguls talk you'd think I was flat on my back." Edward guessed that in another moment it would be too late to warn Margaret, even gently, of the hazards to which young people were exposed these days. He was about to speak of them when, to his surprise, he saw that Margaret's eyes were mirrored with tears. Edward felt tricked and betrayed by sympathy. "I wish I were going instead of Joe," he repeated flatly. "Here." He placed the peach in Margaret's empty palm. He walked away without looking back, but he was sure that Margaret was still watching him. He could not understand why he had given her the peach. Perhaps it was because the shadow which lay on her face had made him feel younger than she, and more than ever conspicuous with his limp. In any event, when he met old Matthew Berry in the next block he could not help speaking with unnatural sternness.

Edward had warned Mr. Berry that he should cut down on his drinking. Now, stepping out of O'Connor's Bar into Edward's path, Mr. Berry put on an air of sly and unconvincing penitence. He was carrying a two-quart porcelain pail which foamed with beer, and as he walked towards Edward he tried to hold the beer out of sight, but, with every step he took, its thick collar splashed on the sidewalk. Edward said, "Out for a nice walk, Mr. Berry?" and skirted the bucket with mock solemnity. The old man's guilty grin made Edward feel strong and assured again. This was where he belonged, he told himself. This was his home, this street, these people, Margaret, the old man, spilled beer. How could anyone think of him as being lonely?

The section of the city in which Helen and her husband had taken an apartment was close to the Park. When Edward reached their address, he saw that the apartment building was relatively new, with steel casement windows, a wall of glass blocks lighting the lobby, and a uniformed doorman. Helen's husband must be doing pretty well, Edward reflected. His mother had written him that Helen's husband was a salesman, and Edward had pictured him at once as one of those good-looking go-getters with big white teeth and a powerful handshake who could sell anything. Helen had always admired men who knew exactly what they wanted, who made up their minds quickly and easily, who never doubted themselves. When Helen and Edward had first talked of being engaged, she had said bluntly, "Either you love me or you don't. Either you want to marry me or you don't." Edward had said, "But it isn't like that, it's never like that." Even the certainty of his desire to become a priest had come to him slowly, a year or two later, the sum of a thousand questions which he had asked himself again and again.

As he glanced up at the sheer, glittering face of the building, Edward wondered how much he would be earning by now if he had decided to become something else—an architect, say, with offices on Park Avenue, or one of the bright young doctors hovering over the dull old women at the Memorial? Ten or fifteen thousand a year? Edward smiled, shaking his head. Only successful architects and doctors earned so much, and he would never have been a success anywhere except among these people. He had known that from the beginning. He had tried once to explain to Helen why it was the only life for which he felt suited, but the more he had tried to explain it, the less real his vocation had sounded. In the end, Edward suspected, he had made his choice seem to be a narrow little corridor of escape. Edward said to the doorman, "Mr. and Mrs. Harris?"

The doorman nodded. "Elevator to your right, sir. Apartment 6-B. Been a lovely day, hasn't it, sir?"

"Yes. Fine." Edward walked into the cool, marble-floored lobby. Having come so far, he wanted to run away. It was nearly eight years since he had seen Helen. It was six years since they had exchanged their last perfunctory letters, in which she had written briefly of her life at home and he had described, in too much painstaking detail, the seminary, his teachers and his new friends. Edward turned aside, but the doorman was directly behind him. "It's one of them self-service elevators," the doorman said, "but I'll be glad to run you up, myself, Father, it's no trouble at all."

The doorman had a thick, slightly professional brogue. He was plainly the kind of man who had a wife and seven or eight children waiting for him at home: what Edward's mother called, "a fine, old-fashioned family." Disturbed by his own impatience, Edward said, "No, I'll go up alone, thank you."

When he pressed the button under the painted 6-B in the dark upstairs hallway, Edward heard a bell ringing somewhere inside the apartment, followed by a muffled antiphony of voices. He had time to run his tongue over his lips several times before the door opened. A woman was standing with her face and body shadowed by a strong overhead light, which fell in Edward's eyes. He blinked once and smiled, and the woman said, "Why, Eddie, how nice, it's really you!"

Edward said, "Hello, Helen." For years, without ever having admitted it to himself, he had wondered what the sound of her voice would mean to him. At least it was a relief to settle that. Her voice meant nothing to him. Eight years ago it had been sweet and faintly bell-like, like the ring of a glass trinket on a Christmas tree; now, though it had not changed, it seemed changed, or at any rate inappropriate to her. Edward turned his black Homburg hat in his hands. "It's good to hear your voice again," he said.

"It's good to hear your voice, too," Helen said. She stepped back, and the overhead light ran down the bridge of her nose and touched her plump lips and chin. The light fell also on the lines of her dress. In eight years the boyish shape of Helen's body, like Edward's memory of it, had grown blurred and indistinct. Helen turned and led the way into a living-room filled with spidery tables and chairs. A few artificial flowers were banked on the living-room windows and on the stone hearth. There were no books in the room, but a series of cheap colored prints covered the wall above the couch. As Helen and Edward entered the room, a man stood up beside the fireplace, dropping the evening paper in a broken pyramid about his knees. He was small and compact, with gray hair and pink, slightly wrinkled cheeks. "This is Father Edward, Jack," Helen said. "This is Jack, Eddie."

They shook hands. Edward felt absurdly pleased at being younger and taller than Harris. Harris bowed and smiled like an old man. Edward said, "I've been hoping to meet you for a long time, Mr. Harris."

Harris bowed again. He started to speak to Edward, then turned to stare at his wife, as if to take his cue from her. "Better sit down, hadn't you, dear?" he asked. "You know you mustn't overdo."

Helen sat down on the couch and patted a soft, chintz-covered cushion beside her as an invitation to Edward. She still looked pretty and rather doll-like, Edward decided; but that was all she looked. It was odd to think that a few minutes before he had been afraid to meet her. He sat down on the couch and waited to see what she would say. But it was Harris who spoke first. "Offer you a drink, Father?" Harris asked.

Edward said, "Thanks, but I'm more or less on duty tonight," and Helen gave her quick, high laugh. Edward cut into the laugh to say, "But you go ahead and have one, sir. Please don't mind me."

Harris shook his head. "No, no. It doesn't matter a bit."

Helen said, "Don't you think our apartment's nice, Eddie?"

"Yes, it's fine." Edward glanced at the artificial flowers. "It's very cheerful."

"Of course it's our own furniture. We had it shipped down from Boston. We bought every single piece together, didn't we, Jack?" Helen cocked her head. "I love to buy furniture, don't I, dear? But Eddie knows that. Eddie knows it just as well as you do. Eddie and I used to window-shop by the hour, didn't we, Eddie?"

Eddie said uncomfortably, "That's all ancient history now, Helen."

"Oh, we're not as old as all that! You'll die, Jack, when I tell you this, but Eddie and I even bought a bed. We did, too, Eddie. You see, Eddie's mother decided that her poor lamb needed a new bed, and we thought I might as well help him pick one out. It just seemed sensible, that's all That is, at the time. And we picked out a lovely bed, didn't we, Eddie? A Colonial four-poster with one of those canopy things on it, like George Washington's. Solid Honduras mahogany." Helen touched Edward's elbow. "Do you still have that bed, Eddie? Do you still sleep in it?"

Edward said, "Of course not. It's up at Mother's, where it belongs." He turned hurriedly to Harris. "Have you ever lived in New York before, sir?" he asked.

Harris appeared to share Edward's embarrassment. He said, "No, I never have; but it seems like a pretty nice little town." Edward and he laughed together. Like an old man, Harris repeated the joke. "Never actually lived here, but I like a cosy little place about this size."

Helen said, "Eddie, look at me." She took his chin in her rounded, pink-tipped fingers. "You cut yourself," she said. "You cut yourself shaving tonight."

"No," Edward said, "no, I did that this morning. I had an early funeral mass to sing."

"Eddie!"

"I did. As a matter of fact, he was one of the biggest politicians on the East Side. A regular old-time boss."

Helen drew together her plucked brows. "I don't believe it. What was his name?"

Edward studied the neat gold label inside the crown of his hat. "Why, Neely," he said at last. "Thomas Francis Neely. He was a good provider." Edward stood up abruptly. "I'm sorry I can't stay, but I've one or two calls to make. I promised to visit old Mrs. Varey by half past seven. It must be nearly that now."

Harris glanced at his watch. Not to hurry him, Edward guessed, but to help him, Harris said, "It's past that. It's going on to eight." He glanced at his wife. "You stay right where you are, dear. Remember what you were told by Dr. Boucher. I'll show Father the way out."

Helen got up, holding her hands clasped in front of her. "What I was told!" she said. "You silly old darling! Jackie, I mean. I guess I can walk as far as the front door if I want to."

Harris ducked his head in defeat. He said to Edward, "Maybe we could get together for lunch some day. Maybe we could go up to a ball game some afternoon."

Edward found that he was eager to agree with Harris. He liked him a lot, but he knew that he would never see him again. He said, "That would be fine. Call me up whenever you get some free time."

Harris bowed his old man's bow. As Helen walked towards the front door, Edward noticed Harris gathering up and folding the evening paper over and over between his small white hands. In the foyer, Helen said, "I know you haven't any calls to make, Eddie, but that's all right. You'll come and see me again, won't you?"

"Of course I will. It's just that tonight I promised—"

Helen laughed. "You're not surprised about the baby?"

Edward could think of no way to mask the first awkwardness of the announcement. With a show of heartiness, he said, "Why, I guess I am surprised. I never thought—"

Helen said, "You never thought I'd have one, did you, Eddie?"

He said, "I never thought about it at all." He reached behind him and opened the door. "I'm afraid it's getting late. Good night, Helen. Goodbye."

"Why, Eddie!" Helen said. "Eddie, wait a minute. I want to talk to you."

Edward shut the door and stood motionless in the dark hallway, catching his breath. Luckily, when he rang for the elevator, it came from the floor above. The click of the elevator doors opening into the lobby aroused the doorman, who, though standing, had apparently been taking a nap. "Down again, is it?" the doorman asked. "Can I get you a taxi, Father?"

Edward brushed past him without answering. He walked through the open doorway and along the narrow, tree-lined street towards the River. The sky, he noted irrelevantly, had turned from sea-green to blue, and the air was so still that the dust hung visibly suspended in it. Somewhere over Queens a plane with winking lights sank lower and lower against the banked-up night clouds. Edward walked fast and clumsily, not masking his limp, and after a few minutes he felt himself sweating. He was glad that he had seen Helen. He was glad that there was nothing left to regret. And yet he was sorry, too, that there was nothing left to regret. It was as if he had been robbed tonight, without warning, of a part of his past. It was as if the past, which should have been beyond change, had dwindled into something stale and a little foolish.

By the time he reached the borders of his parish, with the gray bulk of the church rising over the line of roofs, Edward was careful to walk slowly, as befitted a priest. The high stone stoops and entries were empty, but, glancing in at the lower windows of the identical, familiar houses, Edward was able to make out whole families of parishioners gathered at their checkered kitchen tables. Through one window he noticed the Berrys seated under a naked electric bulb, the children reading comic magazines, Mrs. Berry mending a folded denim shirt, the old man with his empty porcelain bucket between his ankles. Further along the street, Mrs. Barbieri had finally closed her shop and joined her family upstairs. The wooden fruit trays were stacked under the awnings, and a brown cat lay curled on abandoned beet and carrot tops.

Crossing the street towards the rectory, Edward heard a faint sound of voices from a corner doorway. Through the darkness he made out a deeper darkness of two bodies joined together, barely breathing. Those joined shadows were almost certainly Margaret and Joe, he thought. They were together again. In spite of the war, in spite of Joe's mother, they were together. It was as if everyone—Margaret and Joe, the Berrys, the Barbieris, even Helen and her husband, with their fine Boston furniture—were together tonight. For a moment, Edward hesitated, thinking he had heard someone call his name; then he walked on. He had nothing to say to Margaret and Joe, nothing except that he was glad they were together.

When he reached the rectory, Edward saw that a light from the kitchen was still throwing narrow bars of shadow over the areaway, but he climbed the two flights of stairs to his room without speaking to Mrs. Neely. He sat down on the enameled iron cot and shut his eyes. "Together," he said, "together, together." The word crowded in on him from the four walls and ceiling. He had wanted this, he had asked to work here alone in this dirty, run-down, half forgotten neighborhood. He had known what he must expect to give up. But it hadn't been easy. It wasn't easy now. Feeling the package under his hand, Edward ripped at the tough twine with which his mother had bound it. When at last the twine broke and the thick brown paper curled away under his hands, he stood up and snapped on the light. One by one, he lifted the separate, separately remembered articles from the package: the 1910 college pennant which had belonged to his father, the battered metal desk set he had won as a prize at school, the faded runner from his bureau at home.

Quoting from his mother's letter, Edward said aloud, " 'Home. More like home.' " Then he glance around the bare, white-walled room. For the fiftieth time, he noted how Mrs. Neely had contrived to place the most threadbare section of the carpet under his cot, and how she had mended the draperies in such a way that the neat patches hung out of sight among the folds. Even the pine bureau, which would otherwise have slanted downhill, was propped upright by a crooked tower of pennies. Edward stood for a moment at the window. The church next door rose enormously against the night sky, looking, Edward thought, like some stone creature which could neither sleep nor change. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a figure in uniform walking from the doorway across the street. Edward turned and, gathering up the pennant, the desk set, and the runner, dropped them back into the opened package. He carried the package down the stairs to the front hall. Leaving it on the bottom step, he opened the door and walked outside.

Margaret was standing motionless in the doorway. Edward touched her bare arm. "He's gone?"

Margaret said softly, "I made him go. It's—I had to make him go."

"Margaret, you mustn't—"

With a sudden fierceness, she said, "Oh, you don't know! You don't understand!"

Edward said, "Maybe not." Taking her arm, he led her across the street and into the rectory. He picked up the package on the step and smiled over it into Margaret's eyes. Now, for the first time, he felt free of the old bondage. Now, for the first time, he felt free of everyone, and ready to get on with his job. He nodded towards the narrow passage which led to the kitchen. From where they stood, they could see Mrs. Neely sitting as usual in her black rocker, her stockinged feet on the nickel-plated rim of the stove. A fat chocolate layer cake, encrusted with walnuts, lay untouched on the table beside her. Mrs. Neely was bound to know someone who wanted a 1910 college pennant, only slightly soiled, or a battered metal desk set. "Mrs. Neely," Edward said softly, "please ask us in. We're hungry."

ROBERT WHITTINGTON

The Death of García Lorca

FOR LAJOS EGRI

You, who walk on through the night
With your powerful organ-grinding,
Driving a music of purpose
Up through the toneless lives,
So bent on the beauty you bring them,
You're deaf to the ring of the pennies!
Look back; and see me, your monkey,
Still skipping along behind!

PROLOGUE

September, 1936! . . .
Yells of dying men
On all the roads of Spain!
Way up on bells sniped at by snarling moons
Black storks in sleep are choking
On smoke of cannon!
Whiter than whitewashed walls
Dancing-girls are sobbing
In blankets on the ground!
On roofs of rush-green marble
Night has broken
Water jars of wailings! . . .

(Sound of gasping over rock and gravel)

—*Quien pasa?*

O night of wild dogs howling
Over their purple vomits!
O night of scissors
On the mandolins! . . .

(Louder gasping)

QUIEN PASA? Who climbs like song
Up from the bleeding cities?
Who drags his feet with pain
Up the mountains of Granada
To the caverns of the Gypsies?

(Knocking on a heavy door)

What psalms of birds in ashes
Does he bring the dreaming Gypsies,
Who knocks in night unending
On Margarita's cave?

(Louder knocking)

LORCA (Calling softly): Margarita!
(Louder): Margarita! Preciosa!
(Louder): Open the door, Gypsies!
In life's name, open!
(Louder): Open, I say!
For love of the blood of our clan!
For love of our ponies panting
Through valleys of burning flesh!
MARGARITA (From her pile of straw. Sleepily): Who's there?
LORCA (Calling in): It's Federico.
MARGARITA (Straining her deaf ears): Who?
LORCA: Federico, Grandma!
Hurry, let me in!
MARGARITA (Hoarsely): Who? Death?
Go away, you old pig!
I'm not ready for you yet.
Besides—
We're only *young* Gypsies here—
A couple of scalding girls
Dreaming of men made of snow
On pillows of fresh dandelions!

LORCA: This isn't Death, Margarita!
It's Federico.
Open, please!
For love of babies cursing
The caves of their scooped-out eyes!—
Please!
MARGARITA: Death, you flying garbage,
You swill of worms on wings!
If you're really hungry for souls

(Sound of distant bombing)

Down in *Granada gutters*
Hear the brown mud calling!
Go away! I won't come!
I'm not ready for you, I said!
PRECIOSA (Jumping up in exultation): Grandma!
MARGARITA: What, Child?
PRECIOSA (So that *Margarita* can hear): It's Federico! Federico García!
Shame on you for a deaf one!
Open the door!

(Lorca keeps up knocking and calling)

MARGARITA: Ha-a-ah? *García Lorca?*
The guitar that walks in his sleep?
The mole that squeaks in the dark?
PRECIOSA: Angel, Grandma!
MARGARITA: That spawn of Rosa the Black Sheep
Knocking on *my* cave door?
PRECIOSA: Angel, Grandma, all angel,
From the yellow sash on his hips
To the moles on his lifted wrist
When he talks with his chums the saints!
Open the door!
MARGARITA (Grunting fiercely): I *will not!*

(Shrieking at the door)

Vamoose you food for maggots,
You monkey *brother* of Death!
Down the crags, you eel,
Down, scum of an alien,
To the mud of *Granada gutters!*
PRECIOSA: I'll open the door myself, then!
MARGARITA (Grabbing *Preciosa*): Don't you dare!
PRECIOSA (In *Margarita's* clutch): Let me go!
MARGARITA: I *will not!*
PRECIOSA (Struggling): How could you ever be so cruel
To any one of our own tribe?
Even if he were a snake
If he crawled on a Gypsy belly
We should share our cave with him!
MARGARITA: *We?* Share our cave with *cowards?*
Never, while Gypsy mouth
Drools pepper at the corners
And can scotch a snake with spit!
What has he ever done for you
That you should love him so?
PRECIOSA: He taught me to go without food
To feed the hungry sparrows!
MARGARITA: And go without shoes, too, eh?
PRECIOSA: Don't say that!
MARGARITA: So it *stings!* Tell me
What did he do when he found
The Spanish thief in our cupboard
Walking off with my copper kettle
And your many-colored sandals of esparto grass?
PRECIOSA (Struggling harder): It was a poor thief, Grandma. He needed the sandals more than I.
MARGARITA: Rich or poor, what matter?
He was a *Spaniard,* wasn't he?

If your Federico García
Had been a real Gypsy
He'd have made his fingernails daggers
And planted mustachios of steel
In that slinking Spaniard's heart!
PRECIOSA: It was a good thief, Grandma, it was a good thief!
MARGARITA: A good thief? A *good* thief?
Only Gypsies are *good* thieves!
But what did your son of a sheep do?
What did he *do*, but let him
Get away in the night with his blessing,
Yes, sat him down over our sherry
And sang the dirty Spaniard drunk
With songs of Gypsy true-love!
PRECIOSA: Oh, so kind Federico is, Grandma!
Let him come inside
And bathe us with his kind eyes!
Let me go! Grandma, you're mad!
You don't know what you're doing!
By all the jasmine flowers
I ever stuck in your cruel hair!
You're a *witch,* not a Gypsy!
Let me go, let me go, Grandma!

(With a terrific effort she tears herself away and bounding for the door opens it)

Ayyayyayyay!
Federico García!

(She throws herself round Lorca's neck and sobs)

LORCA (Comforting her): What's the matter, Darling?
PRECIOSA (Playfully beating his breast and hugging him): Oh, Federico!
I'll never love my very own husband
As much as I love you!
Oh, you! our well of cold water
We flower-girls all wash our hands in!
Oh, you! our humming snail shell
We wear on our throats for luck!
MARGARITA (With terrible wildcat sarcasm): Well, our fine nightingale,
What have you brought us to *eat?*
PRECIOSA: Wait, Grandma! Don't you see? He's tired out! Let him rest a minute!
(Moaning softly): Oh, ohh!
LORCA (Cheerfully): What's the matter, Little Fragrance?
PRECIOSA: Where's your *guitar,* Federico?
LORCA (Gentle evasiveness): Oh, I didn't bring it this time.
PRECIOSA: Something's happened to it!
LORCA (Gently): Oh-h-h-h, a-a-a-ah,
My old friend, this earth of Spain
(Tapping his foot on the floor):
Crowed like a cock in my ears,
Said, (He mimics):

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!
Give me a present, Federico—
Something to remember you by
Till you come this way again!"

And I gave the red mud of Andalucía
My guitar for a present!
PRESCIOSA: You mean—it's *broken?*
LORCA (Sad, and a little bitter): Yes, Little Flower-toes, it's broken.
MARGARITA (Rasping): Did you hear me? I said,
What have you brought us to *eat?*
LORCA (Severe): Nothing, Grandma, nothing!
I haven't brought you a bread crumb,
Not even the slime on a snail!
But I've brought you something far better
Than bread or cake could ever be!

MARGARITA (Spitting): Those songs of yours again,
Those—mmmmmm!—delicious songs!
LORCA: Don't bristle your fur so, Grandma,
You needn't be afraid!
Never again shall I frighten the Gypsies
With songs that scorch and cut!
With my Moors riding to battle
Against oceans of tears of black granite
Armed with scimitars made of rainbows
Sharp and long as your fingernails!
Ayyayy! never again shall I scare them
With my cannibal nightingales
Scalping drunken Civil Guards
With the brown hatchets of their bleeding breasts!
Take your hands off your ears!
MARGARITA: Turn into a man! I'll take my hands off!
Bring us food! I'll listen!
LORCA (Desperate): Margarita, for love of all Gypsies,
For love of Antonio our King,
For love of the saints, I pray you
Listen to me this once
Though you never listen again!
MARGARITA (Cursing): You *Spaniard!*
If I were King Antonio
I'd have whipped you into pulp!
I'd have turned your black sheep's back
Into a song of welts!
PRECIOSA (Horrified): Grandma!
LORCA: Don't bother her!
Preciosa, Blossom of Ginger,
Have you heard all the snarling
Down there in the city?
PRECIOSA: *Have* I *heard!*
But I can't understand it!
—Oh, how wonderful this quiet *is* now!
I've raced to the top of the mountain
And taken handfuls of geraniums
And stuffed them in my ears!—
LORCA: Preciosa, from here to Cordoba,
From Cordoba to Madrid, and away!—
Stars are hiding salty beaks
In puddles of brave Spanish blood!
Oranges against the stars
Can't be seen for fogs
Of drunken breath of murderers!
How shall I sing the patter
Of blood in loose black sand?
How shall I paint the sound
Of knives in angel kidneys?
How can my poor tongue say it?—
From Málaga, grave of ships,
To Seville, to Bay of Biscay,
From Biscay to the Seven Seas,
The moon is sucking up
Long columns of dark red rain!
The sun shall not see the world
Through clouds of Spanish blood!
PRECIOSA (Excitedly): Let's run away, Federico,
You and me together!
Up on top of the cliff
We can hide in the caves of swallows
Or in the hand of the statue of Saint Michael—!
LORCA: *You'll* never run away!
I know you better than that!
Preciosa, Child, I've brought you
And the Gypsies of our tribe
A greater gift than any
Man ever before brought up to them
Or saints from heaven dropped!
PRECIOSA: I'll bet it's a white mantilla
I can wear and go running through the crowds,
Hawking my geraniums
On the Blessing of the Palms!

Let me see, Federico,
You know how I love presents!
(Lorca proudly holds up his bayonet. Preciosa shrieks): *Blood!*
LORCA: My own bayonet, Preciosa,
Wet with human blood!
PRECIOSA: No!
LORCA: Little windblown Fluff of Dandelion,
Take this and keep it forever!
Go and tie it up on a garland
Of white oleanders, and hang it
From your neck of strawberry flame!
Wear it on the Day of Santiago
And the Blessing of the Palms!
PRECIOSA: Me? Oh, no!
LORCA: You *must!*
Bear me witness, Little Blossom
Of Goldenrod struck by lightning,
Never before in my whole life
Have I hurt any man or thing living,
Not so much as kicked my toenails
In the flank of a lazy mule!
PRECIOSA: You want me—to—take —this?
LORCA: Yes! I want you to wear it
In the palms of your flower-hands.
Preciosa, Blossom of Heaven,
I want to teach you how to *kill!*
PRECIOSA: You?—want to teach me how
To kill poor innocent people?
Little babies crying at breast,
Old folks falling of hunger?
What—what's happened to you, Federico?
LORCA: You lied to me, Preciosa,
You lied with all your ugly little heart!
PRECIOSA: *Lied?*
LORCA (Thundering): *Lied!*
You told me you loved your flowers.
PRECIOSA: I do.
LORCA: You know some people, then,
Who are really flowers, don't you?
PRECIOSA: Some.
LORCA: Do you like people who aren't flowers?
PRECIOSA: I hate them!
LORCA: I wonder!—
Would you *fight* for your flowers, say,
If skipping along through briars
You suddenly saw your lilies
Eaten up and trampled by wild boars—
By wild boars gorging and gurgling
On their green blood?
Would you *fight* for you flowers *then?*
PRECIOSA: If I ever caught a wild pig
Eating any flowers of mine
I'd take and bury this bayonet
In the dirty pig's insides!
LORCA (Clapping his hands): Good! good!
Well, down in Granada tonight
There's a *war* between wild boars and flowers!
Are you sure, now, you love your flowers
Enough to fight for them?
PRECIOSA (Snatching the bayonet from Lorca): Give me the bayonet!
Give it me!
LORCA: Good!—
Time has come for us Gypsies
To go down in the streets and fight
Side by side with the flowers of Spain!
MARGARITA (Not trusting her bad hearing): Ha-a-a-a-h?
LORCA: Grandma, I'm sending Preciosa to call our whole tribe together.
MARGARITA: What for?
LORCA: We must all go down to help the Spaniards.
MARGARITA: You'll see me dead before you see that day!
LORCA: Tonight you'll see it!

If Gypsies still are Gypsies
And if my tongue's still tongue!
MARGARITA: We? The Gypsies? Help *them?*
We, who for centuries
Have had for porridge
The crack of their whips?
We who have roasted like hedgehogs
For the tables of their kings?
LORCA: Are you *so* deaf?
Down there! Just hear! Try!

(Sound of bombing throughout)

Every bomb is a Grandma like you
Screaming for us to help them!
MARGARITA (Gritting her teeth): Good! At last they're getting what they deserve!
PRECIOSA: But don't you *understand?*—
There are two kinds of Spaniards!
And we must stop the wild boars
From murdering the flowers!
MARGARITA: A lot it means to us
How many kinds there are!
We're against them all!
LORCA: There is no longer room for hate
In any Gypsy's soul.
Saint Michael help us, Grandma,
If the wild boars win!
Grass and things to eat
Won't be able to grow on this earth!
Not only the flowers of Spain
And the grass on the ground, Grandma,
But even Antonio's Gypsies
Stand in the cards to die!
MARGARITA: Then die we shall, and gladly,
But we shan't help the Spaniards!
Here we'll stay in our caverns
Till Doomsday scratches us out,
If my words any longer
Have weight in Antonio's ear!
PRECIOSA: Do you really think the Gypsies
Will listen, Federico?
You know how much they all
Look up to Grandma.
LORCA: If my tongue should fail to move them,
Look here in my thigh—
Here's *something* that won't!
PRECIOSA (Crying out): You're wounded!
MARGARITA: Good!
LORCA (Comforting *Preciosa*): It's only a little hole, my Darling!
(Chuckling): Nothing to worry about,
But it'll surely push our Gypsies
Into the public squares.
Don't stare so. It's only blood!
Just think!—
When it gets better I'll write
A great terrible poem about it!
There'll be more guts in that one little poem
Than in all the Fascist Civil Guard!
Ayyayy! what a poem that will be!
And I'll sign my name—
"Federico García Lorca,
Soldier and Gypsy and *Spaniard!"*
I'll sign my name in almond petals
On the grave of the Civil Guard!
MARGARITA: You'll be punished! We Gypsies have ways to punish cowardly traitors like you!
PRECIOSA (In a temper): Keep your tongue to yourself, you old wildcat!
Don't you dare call him that!
You're the traitor!
Heaven turn my blood to water
And my flowers punch me in the nose

And may I eat dung in the streets
If Federico lies!

LORCA: Don't waste words on her! Go! Get Rafael the Birdtamer, Ignacio the Bullfighter, Antonio our King. Even that old maid Eulalia. (Laughing) *Some* fighter *she'll* make, but get her anyway! Everybody, and tell them to get here fast! Go! What are you waiting for?

PRECIOSA: I'm afraid to leave you here.

LORCA (Laughing): With Grandma?

PRECIOSA: Your thigh . . .

LORCA (Laughing, passing it off): Go on with you!

(To *Margarita*): Away from that door, Margarita! I don't want to hurt you!

MARGARITA: You'll have to kill me before I let her pass.

LORCA: All right, I will, if need be! Viva España!

MARGARITA (Sounds of anguished struggle): You weakling, you can't make me . . . !

LORCA (Gentle firmness as *Margarita* slumps moaning to the floor): Oh, yes, I *can!* Even I! There! Pass, Preciosa! Now, run!

(Calling after *Preciosa* as her light feet are heard fleeting away): Remember, call everybody!

(To *Margarita*): Oh, Grandma, see what happens
When hatred fights with justice!

MARGARITA (The fight temporarily out of her, moaning): Oh! oh! oh!

LORCA: Grandma, I *should* have killed you!
What matter all your pride
And all your bitterness
When forty thousand Gypsies
Shall make hot soup for Death
Unless we take sides *now?*
What matter the ancient bullets
In our souls or in our thighs

(He slaps his wounded thigh):

When the mountain swallows
Shall never be wakened again
By hammer of Gypsy blacksmith
Or Gypsy shepherd singing?

MARGARITA (Continued moaning): Oh! oh! oh!

LORCA (Bending over her): Oh, Grandma, did I really hurt you?

(*Margarita* spits at him): May I get you a glass of wine?

(She spits again): Very well, I'll get it!

(*Lorca* manipulates the wine jugs rather clumsily)

What, not a drop? the jugs all empty?
Not even a saucer of sherry
For you who love sherry so much!
Would you like some water then?

(More jugs are upset)

Not a drop of *water?*
And not a fountain on the mountains
To draw any more from?
All the springs poisoned
By snouts of wild boars!
Poor little old Spitfire,
How hungry and thirsty you must be!—

(Sudden stab of realization)

Ayyayy! Spain without wine or water!
Spain of corpses of heroes!
But we shall be victorious
Though it take us three millenniums!
Come a thousand winters, come a thousand springs,

I'll carry you, Grandma, on my back
Over the laughing sunsets!
We'll catch dewdrops in our hands and hair
And drink a toast together
To the glory of the Spaniards
And the glory of the Gypsies!

(The Bells of Granada ring out.)

Listen! the bells of Granada
Speaking as they spoke to our fathers
In times of spilt blood!
BELLS OF GRANADA (Like the wailing old women): Spanish people behind barricades!
Gypsies up on the mountains!
Patch up your ancient quarrels!
Flowers of Spain, unite!
LORCA (Rapturous): Did you *hear?*
MARGARITA: Bah! the Gypsies will see you pay for this!

(Sound of racing feet, nearer and nearer)

LORCA: They're coming!
MARGARITA: To crush you, you serpent! Ha ha ha!

(Knocking on the heavy door)

LORCA (Opening the door and letting the Gypsies in): Rafael, my old friend! Ignacio, you bull-butcher, how are you? Francisco, you mandolin-tickler, you! Fernando, you tin-finger! Eulalia, my pet heartbreak! Thank you so much for coming! How glad I am to see you all is a little too hard for a poor poet to say!

(The Gypsies do not answer him. They surround him menacingly. His tone shows this)

Why so silent, why so sullen? Speak! Rafael, say something! Say you're glad to see me!
Rafael (Utter contempt): We have nothing to say to you!
LORCA: Ignacio, speak!
IGNACIO (Courteously): If you'll pardon me, I'll wait and let Antonio speak for me.
LORCA: Francisco, what, no song?
FRANCISCO: My *whip* will sing when Antonio comes!
LORCA: Fernando! Ricardo! José!
(No answer but sullen silence):
You too, Eulalia?
EULALIA (In a burst): I can't see it happen!
They mean you ill, Federico,
They mean you great ill!
LORCA: What ill? What have I done?
I bring you all gladness and glory.
MARGARITA: Ha ha ha ha ha!
They come to pay you
For what you did to me.
RAFAEL: Did he hurt you, Margarita?
MARGARITA: He almost broke this arm off!
FRANCISCO: Ohhhhh!—
My whip's too good for him.
I'll break the liver out of him!
IGNACIO (In a gentlemanly manner): Please wait, Francisco!
RAFAEL (Roughly): Yes, save your blows!

(Sound of heavy feet outside)

Here comes Antonio now!
Let him in, Gypsies!

(Gypsies open the heavy door)

LORCA: Antonio! Help me, Antonio! Speak to these Gypsies!

ANTONIO: What shall I tell them, Federico?
LORCA: You know. Preciosa must have told you.
ANTONIO: I can't believe it of you, Federico. (Swaggering) Get back, Gypsies! I'm king here!
LORCA: You mean—
You can't believe that I
Could leave behind my singing
To obey my country's call?
ANTONIO: Take this thorn from my heart.
Say it isn't true!—
That you who've done so much
In honor of our Gypsies
Could turn around and stick
This dagger in our backs!
Is it true you've come to get us
To go down to Granada?
LORCA: As true as this is blood
And bullets in my thigh!
ANTONIO: Hide it! We don't want to see it.
Would you blind us with your shame?
Stand by, Gypsies! Make your whips ready!
Stand by to whip the traitor
Till he bleeds from head to foot!
EULALIA (Shrieking): I told you, Federico, I told you!
Great ill they bear you, great ill!
MARGARITA: Ha ha ha ha ha!
LORCA: Whip me if whipping's your pleasure,
But you can't call me traitor,
That I'll *not* allow you!
Mild I have been, perhaps,
And soft as an over-ripe melon,
But give me a little time
And I'll do a thing for my tribe—!
ANTONIO: Your pretty poems will hardly excuse this pretty treachery.
(To the Gypsies): Up whips!
LORCA: Whip me, you souls of lead
That shine like patent leather!
With those same pretty poems
I and I alone
Have carried your glory and *kindness*
Through Spain and all the world!
And with my life's blood
I'll write you a poem tonight
That shall win you glory for ever!
ANTONIO: Down whips!
LORCA (In pain): Ohhhhhhh!
(Then gritting his teeth): *Again!*

(The whips crack and sing and thwack in crescendo against his flesh. Against the whips rises his speech. *Margarita's* laughter mounts and mounts. *Eulalia* is heard with her hysterical "I told you they meant you great ill, I told you they meant you great ill!")

Oh! oh! oh!
To think it was I who wrote
Such poems to these curs!
To think it was I who once wanted
To make the whole world Gypsy!
(His voice a choked whisper):
Granada! Granada! Granada!
Forgive them!
That they should be so blind!

(*Lorca* collapses on the floor. *Preciosa* comes running in, pushing the Gypsies aside)

PRECIOSA (Bending over him): Federico! (Louder) FEDERICO!
(To the Gypsies, with clenched, hissing hate): Who *did* this?
LORCA (Faintly): Gypsy pride, Preciosa,
High and mighty Gypsy pride!

PRECIOSA (Jumping to her feet, bayonet in hand): I'll kill you all!

(A howling and yelping from down the mountainside stays *Preciosa*)

RAFAEL: What's *that?*
MARGARITA: Wolves.
LORCA (Sitting; gently): No, Grandma. I'm afraid it isn't wolves.
RAFAEL: The bearded vultures of Mars
With black fangs of poisoned sunlight!
LORCA: No, Rafael. I'm afraid
It's not black vultures either!

(The howling and yelping mounts and mounts)

IGNACIO: It's the corpse of the green wind out of Africa
Who attacks by night!
LORCA: No, I'm afraid not, Ignacio!
ANTONIO: It's the wild boars I used to fight
In swamps of Guadalquivir!
LORCA: Don't make me laugh, Antonio. You know it's not wild boars.
ANTONIO (Fiercely): What *is* it, then?
ALL THE GYPSIES: What *is* it? What *is* it?
LORCA: Guess!
RAFAEL: We can't! Tell us!
CIVIL GUARDS (Smashing on the heavy door): Open up, you filthy Gypsy hedgehogs!
LORCA (Low-pitched, scalding triumph): It's *human beings!*—men
Shaped even better than you and me!
With skulls full of outhouses
And stools of kings and queens!
You cannot call them Spaniards,
You cannot throw a slander
On pigs, and call them swine!
ANTONIO: What can they want here?
LORCA: What do you think?
PRECIOSA: Federico? You!
LORCA: Who else? After all it was I
Who fought them all day in Granada.
IGNACIO: But how can they know you're here?
LORCA: Our friends the Civil Guard
Have long invisible tongues
And can taste a poet's blood
From one side of Spain to the other!

(Smashing on door continues, with shouts to open)

PRECIOSA: Are you going to let them take him? Hide him, you monsters! Quick!
ANTONIO: Hide him? Where?
PRECIOSA: There's a secret compartment in the door where our fathers hid their smugglings. They'll never find him there.
FRANCISCO: Let the Civil Guard take him!
RAFAEL: Let them take *you!*
IGNACIO: No matter how evil he is, he's still a Gypsy!
RICARDO: Hide him, I say, Antonio!
JOSE: Hide him!
ALL THE GYPSIES, MARGARITA LAST: Yes, hide him!
ANTONIO: All right, hide him; I'll take his legs! You take his shoulders, Rafael.
LORCA: Get back, I say, get back,
You things with broken knees!
You shall not make me lose
The joy you've helped me win!

(As they seize him):

Let me down! If you hide me
They'll take you instead, my Gypsies!

They'll — take — you — instead, I tell you!

(His voice is muffled as the secret compartment is locked on him)

RAFAEL (As the lock clicks): There! We've fixed you now, Poet! You'll *never* get out!

ANTONIO: Open the door, Margarita! Help her, Preciosa!

MARGARITA (*Preciosa* having opened the door): Good evening, kind sirs!

FIRST CIVIL GUARD: Out of our way, Hag!

(Knocks *Margarita* down)

SECOND GUARD: Give us García Lorca!

ANTONIO: He's not here!

THIRD GUARD: We tracked him up the crags. We heard his voice. Give him up!

IGNACIO: We beg your pardon, but he's just not here.

FIRST GUARD: We have ways to deal with liars and connivers!

MARGARITA (Sitting up): Bah! you cowards!
You'll never find García Lorca!
He's changed his shape to an eagle's
And flown away to the stars!

SECOND GUARD: Cut out that Gypsy magic stuff!

MARGARITA: A Gypsy can do anything. I spirited him away myself!

THIRD GUARD (Knocking *Margarita* down again): Shut up, you witch! Where's Lorca, King?

ANTONIO: Margarita told the truth.
A Gypsy can do anything.

THIRD GUARD (Knocking *Antonio* down): Anything but tell the truth —*King!*

PRECIOSA: Gracious Sirs, sit down and make yourselves at home. I'll do one of my latest dances for you.

FIRST GUARD (Snatching up *Preciosa*): Ha, Pretty-face!
You tell us where he is
Or we'll cut your body to pieces!

PRECIOSA: Cut me into a million pieces! I'll never tell where he is!

(They hurl her down)

FIRST GUARD: Line up against the wall, all of you! Come on, you, too!

(Hurls *Eulalia* against the wall)

EULALIA AND ALL THE GYPSIES (Their cries mounting): Never! we'll never tell! Never! never! never!

(Sounds of distant screams from down the mountain)

FIRST GUARD (Unctuously): Hark! the screams of children
Of foolish fathers who fight us!
We'll give you exactly
Till ten children have screamed!

(Several screams against absolute silence in the cave, broken only by the panting of the Gypsies. From inside comes a series of faint knocks)

A GUARD NEAR THE DOOR: Captain!

FIRST GUARD: What?

THE GUARD NEAR THE DOOR:
There's something in the door!

FIRST GUARD: Get it out!

GUARDS NEAR THE DOOR: A secret compartment! What's *this?*

LORCA (Emerging): Thank you. I was quite uncomfortable.

ALL THE GUARDS (Joyfully): Lorca!
THE GYPSIES (Abysmally): Federico García!
LORCA (To the Civil Guards): So, my happy children,
You've come all this way to get me!
I never thought my bullets or my poems
Could make such an impression!
FIRST GUARD (Seizing him): Come out in the night, Federico,
The night you love so well!
We want you to teach us how
To talk with the nightingales!
LORCA: The nightingales would drop their dung on me
If I should dare to teach you!
Let me go! Take your hands off!
As you well know, I'm not the sort
To cause you any trouble!
FIRST AND SECOND GUARDS (Dragging him): Come on! You're wasting our time!
LORCA: Let go!
Are you fools as well as fiends?
There's one thing you cannot deny
Your greatest poet!
FIRST GUARD (Roughly): What do you want?
LORCA: Just to read my Gypsies
My one last little poem—
In praise of *you!*
THIRD GUARD: Don't let him!
SECOND GUARD: Let him! We'll punctuate it!
FIRST GUARD (Roughly): Well, say it!
LORCA: In a second! Only first—spare these people. They've done nothing to hurt you.
FIRST GUARD: Come on, they're just as bad as you are!
SECOND GUARD: They hid you, didn't they?
LORCA: Your hands are red with my blood
Where they whipped me
For trying to make them
Go down to fight you!
Spare them!
FIRST GUARD: Is *that* your poem for us?
LORCA: Not yet!

(They make a move to grab him, but like lightning he spins round and with his back toward the Civil Guard speaks his last poem to his Gypsies):

Gypsies, behold the angels
Sent by Saint Michael
On heaven's own
Sacred bloodhounds
To kill the deadly cow-snake
Who tried to bite you
From your ancient pastures!
Kneel to them!
Kneel to them, Gypsies!
Captain, make them kneel,
Make them kneel, I say!
FIRST GUARD (Amazed at first, then seeing possibilities of some strange new entertainment; with several hard lashes with the flat of his sword): *Kneel!*
LORCA: Thank you!

(Low and far away; as if talking to children):

Gypsies, some day in the ages
When the wind gasps and is desperate
And chokes for an old Malagueña,
And the daisies let fall their sombreros

And bleed for a dew *not red,*
I would have it slowly come over you
To think of me and forgive.

(He pauses for a quick look behind)

When lambs of the Len Baro
Are waiting for Gypsy shears;
And when the taut hills are waiting
For a Gypsy tambourine;
And when the valleys with baskets
Wait, bored, to catch the clash
Of good old Gypsy knives;
And when up in far-away cork trees
Little owls are waiting
To come down and be christened
By a little Gypsy hand;
And when in the charred magnolias
Lovers dull as cigar smoke
Are waiting for fanciful Gypsies
To embroider their tongues—
I would have the dawn rush by
On little black slippers and shout,
"*Wait!* the Gypsies will come—
(Bitter disgust as he stabs it home):
In another eternity!"

FIRST GUARD (Irately): Is that all you have to say? Come *on!*

(They start to drag him but he wrests his arms clear)

LORCA: No! (His voice staccato and near):
Gypsies, tomorrow morning
When, stolen children,
You wake up transformed
And with roaches for ponies gallop
Through all the Alhambras of death,
I would have you slacken the reins
Just once
And try, try, try, to remember
(Blurting out every bit of pride in his body): *What Spaniards you could have been*
Once on a night of whips!

FIRST GUARD: That's *all! Come on!*

(They drag him again; but once more he wrests his arms clear)

LORCA: No!
One thing you'll *still* allow—
My *poem!!!*

(*Lorca* deftly and swiftly takes up the bayonet which *Preciosa* has dropped under the straw, and stabs the First Guard through the heart, shouting):

Death to the Fascists of Spain!
Death to the Fascist Civil Guard!

(In a frenzy of sadism the guards beat *Lorca* and carry him out. They all leave. The Gypsies begin to weep)

ANTONIO (Crying himself): Stop crying, Gypsies. We have no right to cry at a time like this.
EULALIA: What else is left us to do?
PRECIOSA: Down to Granada,
As he asked!
FRANCISCO AND RICARDO: No, never!
JOSE: Up to our caves!
ANTONIO: We cannot. Our caves will be dynamited.

(Shots are heard)

PRECIOSA: They've killed Federico!
BELLS OF GRANADA (Like happy girls): Gypsies in tears, be of cheer!
In smoke of cannon, be glad!
Teach Death, you Spanish people,
How you can laugh in his face!
On to battle, Gypsies!
On over the holes in my body,
Over the little holes!
ANTONIO: His wounds are calling us.

Have you not read the poem
He wrote with his own life's blood?
There is only one thing we can do.
We must go down and fight with the Spaniards,
As Federico asked!

RICARDO: The Civil Guard will be back!

FRANCISCO: If we hurry we can escape!

JOSE: They'll catch us!

PRECIOSA: No! We'll take the trail on the north side. They'll never see us.

ANTONIO: Let us go, Gypsies!

(All the Gypsies file out)

FRANCISCO: Come on, Margarita!

PRECIOSA: Come on, Grandma!

MARGARITA: No, leave me. I'll join you later. I must stay here to give them the wrong directions.

THE GYPSIES (Calling back): Come soon, Margarita!

MARGARITA: Yes, I'll be coming don't you fear!

(With tenderness, nostalgia):

It was here in the doorway
You spit in my face
And broke this arm in two.
Lucky Gypsy! that you left me
One good arm and one good shoulder
To carry you like a banner
Down to the streets of Granada!
We'll wrap your body in cork
And sprinkle it with aniseed brandy
And light it up with Bengal fire
And set it floating for ever
Down the Guadalquivir River!
Your mouth shall open wide
And nibble stars in water,
And then go back to sleep
In the high warm caves
Of our eternal love!

(Sound of Civil Guards returning. *Margarita* stands proudly in the doorway.)

CHRISTOPHER LAZARE

Last Visit

How could I have done it, I ask myself. Here I am, sitting at the same window from which I first saw them, almost expecting to see them again. Did I say almost? Really expecting to see them again! Wishing for them, praying for them, mumbling their names over and over again to myself. Evoking them the way a child evokes some pleasant dream to drive away the terrors of night. Yet there was nothing pleasant about the old woman with her coal-skuttle hat and quivering mouth, as I remember her, crouching under a black umbrella and shielding her eyes from the sun. But, of course, there was Anna. Yes, there was always Anna.

They came to the park, to the same bench every afternoon. Anna with her book or magazine, and the old woman, talking, gesticulating with her disagreeable hands, and Anna nodding, smiling, moving her lips monosyllabically. From the very first they attracted me. They were so like the birds I had watched from my window earlier that summer—busy, precise, occupied only with what was immediately before them. I used to wonder about them. Not about the old woman, but about Anna. She was so quiet, and not patient, but indifferent, indifferent in a warm, sly way. It was almost physical, like the composure of an invalid, of someone who has spent a lifetime in bed or learned to live in an empty house with the shutters drawn and the curtains growing yellow on their rods. They must live alone, I thought, in just such a house.

I came to that conclusion watching their pantomime through a square of window glass. In the same way, I decided that they were not mother and daughter, but perhaps aunt and niece, or that the old woman might even be the girl's grandmother. Their movements—a turn of the head, a sudden frown or smile—took on an intense, an almost ritualistic quality. It was like invoking life from a photograph. I followed them with suspense and agitation, imagining aspects of their characters, filling in their possible traits and motives, and longing to participate, to identify myself in their eyes in some way. Yet I enjoyed the secrecy of my point of vantage, the vicariousness of my connection with them. More than that, it was revenge of a kind on my landlady, Madame Grille, who for weeks had been starving me for company and conversation. (The thought of that malicious woman with her curiosity about my habits, and her obsessed desire to poke her nose into the corners of other people's lives, fills me, even at this moment, with resentment and indignation.)

It is so often true that a mean character is revealed by what at first appears to be an act of kindness. For weeks when I was ill with the grippe, Madame Grille brought me tea and hot rum, sent to the drugstore for pills and patent medicines, knocked at my door a dozen times a day to ask what I needed. Then, one day, I noticed a look in her eye when she set the tray on the tabouret near my bed—perhaps I had been too sick and feverish to notice it before, but it was a look I recognized and remembered. She had looked that way at my canvases once, and once at me when I had passed her on the stair and had caught her in the act of whispering (I knew in a glance about *whom*) with another lodger, a woman who lived on the third floor in a room filled with aquariums of tropical fish. That morning, which was the last time—I swore it to myself—that I would ever accept a tea-tray or a favor from my landlady, there were spiders in her eyes. "It's a shame," she said, bringing her head unpleasantly close to mine as she bent to flick a speck of coal-dust out of the sugar-bowl, "the way you are alone. Suppose something serious should happen? I mean something really serious—no friends, no relatives, no nothing. It isn't right. Maybe you should get yourself a woman. Some nice girl to take care of you. You should go out more, like my son, to the dance halls on Saturday nights." She glanced sharply about the room, straightened something on a shelf and then shuffled out.

I lay back weak and trembling. So this was the explanation for all her attentions—and I had begun to think of her sympathetically, even tenderly! I despised myself for having felt grateful, for having cringed and clucked and over-thanked every slight service. The woman simply wanted to humiliate me, to make me feel shabby and neglected and lonely. I realized all at once that she had always had a contempt for me, for the way I lived, for my tastes and habits and because, for all that, I had done no better for myself in this world than her rooming-house. When she came to take the tray away I pretended to be asleep. I was afraid if I opened my eyes something violent might happen. The next morning when she knocked I didn't answer. She knocked several times again, and then I heard her pass-key turn in the lock. When she came into the room I sat bolt upright in bed and just stared at her. When she asked me what was wrong I pretended not to hear. When she repeated her question I gave no sign of recognition, and, finally, she put down the tray and left. An hour later, she returned and I had to hide my face in the pillow. I knew I would burst into laughter the moment she saw that the things were untouched. I could feel her eyes peering at me over the edge of the bed, and then I heard the cup and saucer rattle and the door close behind her.

After that we no longer spoke to each other. Don't misunderstand me.

I didn't shrink from her or avoid her. On the contrary, I would deliberately wait in the room while she cleaned and dusted, following her with an expression which must have been disconcerting: her small head and short legs, her pear-shaped back with its narrow shoulders and enormous, bulging hips. And she, in turn, wondered, I'm sure, how long I would keep it up, how long I could do without gossip and company, and what I did hour after hour alone in my room. I had given up going out for food or having it served from the kitchen downstairs. There were times, as a matter of fact, when I missed Madame Grille's salads and ragouts, but I derived almost as much pleasure from ordering what I needed from the corner drugstore, using a coin-box telephone in the hall, standing there unshaven and in my dressing-gown, talking loudly enough to be overheard by everyone.

So it went on. I had my secret and she was free to guess it if she could. Certainly it was clear that I could get along very nicely without her. I used to chuckle to myself like a child at a charade, watching those two in the park and knowing that somewhere in the house Madame Grille was reviling and resenting me but finally realizing that I was no fool.

The women on the bench had, of course, begun to play an increasingly important part in my life. It suddenly occurred to me that they might change their place or stop coming altogether, that a dozen things might happen to them which would affect my game with Madame Grille. I began to look for their visits, not with the old interest and pleasure, but with anxiety. Yet they never failed to turn up, day after day, and I continued to enlarge upon their habits and relationship, improvising more and more details.

The young girl's costumes changed frequently. They were never quite fashionable, but more like the clothes that Englishwomen wear. She was, I felt sure, the old woman's niece, the daughter by a sister who had probably made a scandalous marriage and died young. It was curious that all this time I had never noticed Anna's face. I had no more than an impression of it. It seemed distant and vague, like a canvas seen across a room. I began to long again to engage them more closely, to affirm myself in some attractive and charming way. I even thought once of going into the park, of choosing some bench nearby and then opening a conversation. But I dismissed the idea just as quickly. My conduct might appear offensive and, besides, I had Madame Grille to think of.

And then, something commonplace and completely unexpected occurred. It was exactly two weeks after I had recovered from my illness. I had spent the usual two hours at the window that day, and the women were just preparing to leave the park, the old one folding her umbrella, the young one helping her to her feet, when they were approached by a beggar. I was surprised at his accosting the women. What happened after that left me no time for surprise. I saw the old woman's mouth pucker and twist, and then the hand with the umbrella rise in the air. I saw the beggar wrench it from her grasp and threaten her with it. He wavered on his feet and shook the black thing by its stock like a cat by its tail. Anna was talking to him calmly, but it seemed to make little difference. The old woman waved her arms in the air, her face became frantic and convulsed, she seemed like a person drowning on land. I rushed out of the house and tore into the park. When I reached them nothing had changed.

"What is the meaning of this?" I cried with a rage so spontaneous it startled me. "Drop that umbrella, drop it at once!" He turned to me with vacant, bloodshot eyes that were streaked with veins like the grain in wood. "Drop it before I beat you within an inch of your life!" For a moment the umbrella was arrested in mid-air, then it swung out like a golf stick and I could hear my spectacles splinter on the ground. I realize now that I was lost as soon as my glasses were broken. Without them I can see no farther than my nose. I should have stopped then and there and called for assistance, or done something else dignified and intelligent. Instead I lunged at him furiously. I shall never know if I struck him at all, but his umbrella came down on my head and shoulders six or seven times. Then he threw it somewhere behind me in the grass and began to run. Anna stooped to pick up what was left of my spectacles and the old woman just stood there bleating, "Police! Police!" over and over again like a child that has learned a new word. I could taste the blood in my nostrils and in the back of my throat. My forehead and back ached in a dull way as though they were beginning to swell.

"I'm sorry," said Anna. "The lenses are gone but the frame still seems good."

"I have another pair at home," I said, and then, to indicate how casually I was taking it all, I added quite unnecessarily, "locked in my desk drawer."

"We live close by," Anna said. "You must come back with us and let me dress your bruises. There are some bad cuts under your eyes and your lip seems to be swelling."

"Oh," I said, "these things are never as bad as they look. As a matter of fact, I live in the gray house just across the street and I can take care of myself when I get back." There was something about my condition, despite the bruises and welts, that was almost exhilarating. "Permit me to introduce myself," I said. "My name is George Mantauk," and I bowed from the waist although it sent a twinge of pain up my spine. I was feeling incredibly happy.

I could only see Anna vaguely without my glasses but I could tell that she smiled.

"I am Anna Bolden," she said. "My mother and I are both very grateful. It seems so foolish the way the whole thing began. I'm afraid mother was startled and then he just became impossible."

So the old woman was her *mother!* For some reason I found that very depressing. I had been so certain of their relationship. The whole structure I had been building up for weeks seemed to fall away from them. I couldn't quite believe it.

"Your mother?"

The old woman had subsided. She was leaning against the bench, crumpled and black, waiting to be taken home.

"Anna," she said.

"Yes, mother, we're going." Anna took her by the arm, but the old woman held back. "Thank you, young man," she said. "I wish you had come out of it better." I sat down and watched them move slowly along the path and then, suddenly, I remembered the umbrella. I climbed over a rail, got it and, with as much agility as I was capable of, began to run after them.

"Look, look!" I shouted and they both turned around. "Of all the things to forget," I said and I began to laugh. I thought it very funny that the three of us should have overlooked what had started all the trouble.

Anna took the umbrella. "Thank you," she said. "Although I don't think we shall ever use it again. It has too many unpleasant associations."

I tagged along with them to the mouth of the park, without exchanging another word. Then I bowed again and crossed the street. When I reached the house, I realized I had run out without my key. There was nothing to do but ring for Madame Grille. She came to the door and couldn't restrain an exclamation at my appearance. I brushed by her and climbed the stairs to my room. I was feeling thoroughly miserable again. I seemed to ache in a hundred places, and when I looked at myself in the mirror I could see that my eye was turning livid.

What a fool, I thought, not to have gone along with them in the first place, and have it all taken care of properly. I began to regret the whole incident and to see it all in another light. What a mess I had made of things. Running after them with the umbrella. I should have realized they would find it disagreeable. *Too many unpleasant associations*. Could that have referred to me? Didn't they differentiate between me and that other one? Was it possible they held me responsible for what happened, without understanding the real part I had played? Without realizing that I had intended to save them, to protect them? I had obviously shown courage. What did the old woman mean then: *A shame you didn't come out of it better?* Did they take me for some idiot, simply because my glasses had been broken? And is that why I had allowed myself to be pummeled and bruised—to be treated contemptuously by a couple of women who weren't aware of the subtleties of my conduct! I flung myself on the bed. It was too much—to set out like a hero and to be cudgeled and abused like a jackass! I swore to myself that it would never happen again. I must avoid people, even through a window glass.

I got up again and soaked some absorbent cotton in cold water. I washed the cuts with peroxide and applied the cotton to my eye. My head was reeling and I was first beginning to feel the physical effects of what had happened. I lay down again but no matter where I turned there seemed to be a pain. It was insufferable, I told myself—and all for the sake of two absurd people who had already dismissed me from their minds! I think I must have begun to doze off when I heard the knock at my door. For some reason I didn't think of Madame Grille. It was Anna, I felt sure. She had returned to apologize for what she had said about the umbrella or, perhaps, to see how I was getting on. I jumped out of bed and threw my bandages behind the screen.

"Who is it?"

"Is there anything I can do?" My landlady asked from the other side of the door. I swear if she had walked into the room at that moment I would have seized her and throttled her to death.

"To hell with you," I said under my breath. I was even too wretched to derive any satisfaction from having broken her silence, from knowing that she was standing there, on tiptoe in the corridor, listening and bursting with curiosity.

I threw myself on the bed for what seemed the hundredth time. But sleep was out of the question. Humiliation and regrets kept rising in my mind like mountains. I accused myself of being a braggart, a toady, a coward, of things too awful to put on paper, and then, out of sheer exhaustion, I decided to forgive them, Anna and her mother. They were justified in what they felt. My behavior had been utterly offensive. I found comfort in admitting that and finally dropped off.

The next morning I resolved to get to work and give the matter no more thought. I sat down to my drawing-board and I have never seen paper look so blank. My neck kept twitching for the window, my arm seemed paralyzed. There was nothing for me to do but resume my usual position, although it was long before the customary time for their visit. I sat and waited, not impatiently, but almost numb, vacantly following the nursemaids and the children at their games, and finding it all strangely anonymous and anesthetic, as though I were observing it from the top of a passing bus.

I don't know how long I sat there before it occurred to me that they wouldn't come at all. How could they after what had happened yesterday? I was a fool not to have realized that before! My head began to throb and I felt a wave of heat through my body like a fever. I had alienated them in every way. If only I hadn't found it necessary to assert myself in that revolting manner. Anna would have obtained the umbrella herself, there wouldn't have been any public scene and today things would be pursuing their normal course. Anna and her mother would be sitting on their bench and I would be sitting here, watching them, thinking about them, perfectly happy. Even so, I waited for them till long after dusk, just as I am waiting for them now. I thought then that I had cut myself off irrevocably. I experienced a new kind of restlessness and tension. I wanted to move, to walk or run. Without troubling to button my collar or to look for a tie, I went out. (I no longer cared what Madame Grille thought of my actions. I had lost all sense of revenge where she was involved.) I don't remember how long I walked or how far. I do know that when I got home I fell asleep almost at once and slept right through until the letter came the next morning. I awoke to find Madame Grille, already in the room, standing over me with the envelope in her hand:

"You did not answer when I knocked, Mr. Mantauk, and I thought maybe it is important, maybe Mr. Mantauk will be angry if I do not wake him."

She smiled at me blatantly as if to indicate she knew I didn't believe a word she said, and I took the letter from her. I glanced at it long enough to see where it came from, then I put it under my pillow and said: "Thank you, Madame Grille," as calmly as I could. There was nothing for her to do but leave the room, and despite the joy I felt in my heart, I couldn't help gloating. She knew as well as I that there was something extraordinary about that letter. The only mail I ever received came on the first of every month from my uncle and that was a check which Madame Grille usually cashed the same day. This envelope, addressed in a woman's hand, was certainly a different matter. As I tore it open I laughed out loud at the thought of the poor old crow sitting in her kitchen, scratching her head and making herself sick with conjectures. It was a lovely letter, direct and precise, thanking me again, hoping I was better and asking me to tea the next afternoon. As I look back on it now, I know that was one of the happiest moments of my life. I wasn't prepared, then, for what was to follow. I was foolish and excited and although I should have known better, I had faith in both of them as human beings. I reproached myself for having misjudged them, for having attributed false motives to their behavior in the park. I even accused myself of having taken the whole affair morbidly and I was glad that I had forgiven them in my mind long before the letter arrived.

I spent the next morning in a state of agitation. And then suddenly I became almost stupidly calm. I dawdled over everything, taking twice as long to shave, to dress, to have my coffee. Still the time seemed to lag. Finally at four o'clock, I changed my shirt and tie, and solved the problem of my black eye by clipping a pair of sunglasses over my spectacles. I passed Madame Grille on the stairs. (I believe she had begun to lie in wait for me.) "Lovely day, Mr. Mantauk," she said. "Bad news?" I pretended not to understand. "That letter I brought to your room, yesterday. . . ." "Oh, no," I said, and I couldn't help adding over my shoulder as I opened the door, "very good news, indeed!"

Their house, even from its facade, was not what I had expected. There were no signs of neglect, the door knobs were polished, the shutters freshly painted, and the little hedge of shrubbery newly trimmed. I was ushered into a drawing-room which was Victorian and at the same time remarkably well preserved. Anna was sitting on a kidney-shaped sofa between two windows, and when I came in she stood up, smiled and held out her hand. I was almost too astonished to take it. I had never noticed before the extraordinary beauty of her face. It was suffused with a kind of golden glow and her lips, even when she greeted me, were curved in rigid sensual lines, like the lips of a statue.

"Your eyes," she said. "Is there anything serious the matter?"

"Oh no. These glasses are merely a camouflage. I must apologize," I blurted out hastily, "for my conduct in the park. I mean about making you take the umbrella."

"You have nothing to apologize for, young man," her mother said. "The world's standing on its head and who knows who's responsible!"

I smiled and felt a little ill at ease. They hadn't asked me to sit down and I didn't know whether I should or not. I stood in the middle of the room like a schoolboy, with my hands behind my back. Now, of course, I realize that there was malice even in that.

Finally I took a chair. Anna busied herself with the tea things and the old woman persecuted me with questions. How long had I been in New

York? Where did I come from originally? What did I think of the war? All the time I watched Anna out of the corner of my eye, answering her mother mechanically. There was something overwhelming, almost hypnotic, about her face at close range. I could not recover from the surprise of seeing it. Its quality was so unlike anything I had expected. I spent the better part of two hours sitting there, making conversation that was uneventful enough, but, I must admit, I behaved with singular care and restraint. When I got up to go, Anna asked me back again the next Wednesday, and it seemed to me she pressed my hand almost fervently.

That day changed the course of my life. I walked home almost somnambulistically. I felt purged, liberated. Something inside of me that had been constricted and tight suddenly began to expand. My feet felt lighter, the air seemed clearer. I had become a new person.

I found no difficulty in working that week. For the first time in months I made sketches and planned several paintings. The window had lost its attraction for me and I thought only of Wednesday and of how to make the time pass more quickly. I began to order my meals from the kitchen again and when I passed the woman who kept tropical fish I greeted her so ceremoniously that she was astonished. I tried once, too, to sketch Anna's face from memory, but the attempt was unsuccessful and I decided to wait until I knew her better. In the evenings I would walk through the park, up and down in front of The Bench, although at first, I must admit, I had some fear of encountering the obnoxious individual who had broken my glasses. On Tuesday, Madame Grille knocked and slipped a letter under my door. It came from Anna to remind me that I was expected the next day. As though it would have been possible for me to forget! If she only knew how lonely I had been. How I needed people so desperately that I despised and distrusted them. How I lived in this room under a heap of bedclothes, sick and neglected, pining away like some poor beast in the zoo.

I called that Wednesday and many Wednesdays thereafter. The arrival of the invitation became a regular weekly event, although the visits were more, much more than that to me. When I think back on them now, I can't remember anything that occurred, anything that was said or done that was not completely commonplace. Yet it all had a miraculous and mystical quality for me. As though a doom had been lifted, as though my life were being extended from week to week. Of course I had fallen in love with Anna.

I intended to tell her soon, very soon, but I didn't know exactly how. Her mother was always with her. Never as long as I had known her had I seen her alone. Somehow, I felt she knew. I could tell; she had little ways. Ways of glancing at me furtively or pinching my arm, and a trick of excluding her mother from our conversations by suddenly laughing out at something I had said, something the old woman couldn't hear or understand. I didn't think she loved me. That didn't matter. She respected me and regarded me as an intimate. Sometimes, it is true, a doubt would cross my mind, but I would dismiss it immediately. (What a fool I was! I should have known, then, while there was still time.) I would reassure myself with the instance of the umbrella and refuse to entertain any suspicions. I found some difficulty in working, but that was because of Anna's face. I tried time after time for a simple likeness, and always it would elude me. What I drew over and over again was the face I had first seen in the park, not the person who sat opposite me every Wednesday afternoon, smiling, warm and more intimate than anything I had ever dared expect. It troubled me that I could not reproduce that feeling which had become all the more important to me since I intended to present the portrait to Anna as soon as it was finished. I was sure that then she would know definitely, it would be a proof of how I felt. It was the only way that occurred to me.

Once I even thought of taking Madame Grille into my confidence. She was so anxious to know what was going on. She had been bribing me in a hundred little ways, giving me an extra bath towel a day, changing my linen, dusting more carefully. Besides, I really wanted to confide in someone. In the end I decided against it. I began of all things to go to the movies. I found the characters strangely sympathetic, their predicaments strangely touching. If only human beings were such simple, varnished surfaces. If only I could go to Anna, draw her into an adjoining room and declare myself! On the screen life was such a ritual of winks and smiles, everything was so spontaneous and explicit! Why not practise some simple device myself, then? Why not? On the next Wednesday, I decided, I would slip a note into Anna's hand. On leaving—a note that stated everything, explained everything. And this horrible suspense would be over with once and for all. No, it is false to refer to it as suspense. It was ill-ease, discomfort and egotism. I wanted to force things, to bring them to a point. Had I felt any uncertainty, I wouldn't have repeated my visits. She accepted me as a man who loved her. I was sure of that or I should never have contemplated doing something that might leave me open to derision and humiliation.

I spent the next few days framing that note, and I must say, myself, that it was a masterpiece of its kind—discreet and strategic, yet tender and unpresuming. For the first time since I had been calling at their house, that afternoon I was careless about my appearance. I was too preoccupied to spend any time choosing my tie or polishing my shoes. Besides, I wanted to feel as indifferent as possible and my rumpled shirt gave me the courage of a disguise. Before I rang the bell I drew out my pocket handkerchief and dried the palms of my hands. Then I inspected my general manner in the door glass, and felt prepared to go through with it.

When I first walked into the room I didn't see *him* at all. Probably because it was rather dark and probably because I was unaccustomed to finding a third person there. When I did notice him I stared with such confusion that Anna asked us if we didn't know each other, before she introduced us. I took an almost immediate dislike to him. He looked like a business man, an executive of some sort, carefully groomed, with a close-cropped mustache, and when he shook hands he gave me the impression of smiling at someone over my shoulder. His whole person reeked of cleanliness and soap like a public wash-room. I sat down and scarcely said a word all afternoon. I was too shocked and crestfallen. There was something about his manner with the women, and especially with Anna, something intimate and sly, that made me feel as though I were watching them through a window glass again. There was something about Anna, too, that was strange and new to me. She had changed in a subtle way. It was nothing I could name, but I could feel it. A look in her eyes, an inflexion in her voice. And she no longer laughed when I said something I thought witty. She listened attentively and then looked away, as though it took a great effort to hear me. It became clear to me that she wanted to give this man the impression that I was inconsequential. I felt as though they were whispering in my presence, as though I were being excluded from a secret. I watched them with growing resentment. The letter was burning a hole in my pocket. Once I reached for a cigarette and almost upset a teacup. I realized, then, that it was time to go. My agitation was becoming apparent. In another moment I would betray myself in some ludicrous way. I rose hastily. "I must return to my work. A portrait," I said to Anna as suggestively as I could. Then I took the old woman's hand, and for some absurd reason, suddenly bowed and kissed it.

I tried to dismiss the whole situation from my mind on the way home. He was probably some old friend of the family. He might even be their lawyer. I would manage the note next Wednesday. As for the glances and Anna's manner? Well, I knew myself well enough to know that perhaps I was making too much of the whole business. After all, how was Anna to understand what I had expected, what I had planned? When one takes too much for granted. . . . There was time. Next week, the circumstances would be more usual, I would find my opportunity and then, well, who knows. . . ? I might even marry her. The thought was pleasant. It calmed and reassured me. When I arrived home I hid the note where Madame Grille would be least likely to find it and then I attempted the portrait again. I had scarcely started it when it occurred to me that out of all fairness I should inform Madame Grille. I might, after all, be moving out of her house in a few weeks. She ought to be told, and besides I wanted to see her surprise and chagrin. There were few tenants, when you came right down to it, who were as regular, as quiet and undemanding as I. The news would throw her into a panic.

As a matter of fact, she took it stoically. "Are you not satisfied here, Mr. Mantauk," she asked. "That's not involved," I said very carelessly, "You see I'm going to be married and naturally my quarters are scarcely adequate." "Oh," she said, "I am very glad. Very glad that you have taken my advice." I knew of course how she really felt and returned to my room admiring her resourcefulness.

I accomplished very little that week. I had my suit cleaned and paid more than I could afford for a new shirt and tie for Wednesday. The motion pictures had begun to draw me. In the dark, in the quiet, I could relax. I sought out the theaters as though they were caves and I must have seen a dozen films that week. I was afraid to think of Anna. I didn't want to anticipate, I didn't want to misinterpret. I knew how much pain and discomfort I could cause myself, and how groundlessly. I had only to take the encounter in the park as an example. That sort of mistake would not occur again. I felt too different about life. It is true, I was tense, my nerves were at a pitch, but that was natural. It was not unhealthy like the old feeling. There was no doubt I had changed.

Then, on Tuesday I had the first taste of what was to come later. I have thought of that day often since and, of the entire period, I remember it best. I am still vague about the details and events that followed, but I remember looking under the door for the letter that arrived regularly from Anna every Tuesday morning and not finding it there. I ran down to Madame Grille, still in my pajamas and barefooted, and accused her of treachery. She had stolen it and I would turn her over to the police. I accused her of everything I could think of, of the extra towels and bed-linen. I threatened her with everything I could think of. It was no use. She denied it flatly. There was no letter for Mr. Mantauk. She could prove it by her son. It would probably come, whatever I was expecting, in the afternoon mail. Why didn't I go upstairs and wait, instead of standing there with nothing on, inviting a cold! I returned to my room and simply sat. It might even come the next morning. I would take things calmly. It was a slip of some kind. Perhaps the envelope had been misaddressed. So many things were possible. Why jump to conclusions? Why suspect Madame Grille—or even Anna! Anna, of all people! Why after all this time, after all this intimacy, should she decide to ignore me, to have nothing more to do with me? Just because of some man who was paying his first call to my twentieth? It was ridiculous! Nothing came in the afternoon mail, nothing. I would work, I decided, like a rational human being, and then in the morning, there would be the usual note and I would be glad that I had taken it all so casually. I would regard all of my fears as absurd, laugh aloud at them and even apologize to Madame Grille! A few months ago such an idea would have been unmentionable, but that is the effect Anna was having upon me.

I tried for her face again in charcoal, but it was useless. Opposite me on the wall there was a painting, a landscape in oils which I had been proud of as a student. Now, for some reason, it filled me with disgust. Before I knew what I was doing, I seized a knife and slashed it to bits. Then I sat there, cold and trembling, feeling a numbness and nausea in my stomach, a horror that was like a child's horror of the dark. I think I knew then that there would be no letter the next day. I went to bed and lay awake squirming and kicking, struggling to put the whole thing out of mind, to postpone coming to any conclusion, but the memory of my last afternoon at Anna's kept returning. Her glances, her detachment and silence. It forced itself upon me, again and again, suffocating me like a hand at my throat. She was through with me. I would never hear from her again. But why? Why, in heaven's name? Because I was an idiot, a fool. That was why. Because I had *trusted* them! In spite of my own instincts, in spite of myself. And I had no one to reproach. I, alone, was responsible.

Wednesday, when I saw *him*, pass my window on his way to their house, I thought about things differently. I had been too hasty the night before. It was my pride. I must resist that old feeling. I had no right to think such things of Anna or to degrade myself with such accusations. Had I forgotten what sort of person Madame Grille actually was? Yet I had taken her at her word, almost deliberately, almost in order to believe the worst of Anna and myself. Of course she had taken the letter. There could be no question of it. I dressed in a fever and rushed out.

I could hear the teacups rattling and the sound of voices from where I stood in the hallway when the maid told me there was no one at home. I brushed the girl aside without stopping to argue and walked in.

"Oh, Mr. Mantauk," Anna said very calmly, "we weren't expecting you."

"No. I daresay you weren't expecting me," I said menacingly, "but don't apologize. I shall go in a moment. First, though, I should like to ask a civil question and receive a civil answer. How dare you treat me like this?"

"Please, Mr. Mantauk," said Anna. "You are making us all uncomfortable."

"What harm have I ever done you? What is there about me that causes you to insult and abuse me? What gives you pleasure in making me wretched?"

"You have no right to talk to my daughter that way," said the old woman.

"You," I said pointing my finger at her. "I saved your life once! Is that any reason for poisoning Anna against me?"

"Having you here was mother's idea in the first place," said Anna quietly. "Last week when I saw how seriously you were taking it, I decided against it."

"You're lying! You asked me here because you wanted to see me overjoyed! Because you wanted to have me at your mercy, week after week, until some other form of diversion presented itself!"

The other one had been sitting there quietly all this time. Suddenly he came over to me.

"Get out," he said.

"Why don't you throw me out?" I said. "Why don't you just pick me up by the collar and throw me out?"

Anna got up from the divan and took his arm.

"I am sorry you are taking things this way, Mr. Mantauk, and I know that later you will regret it. In any case, I am sorry. Please go now. This excitement is very unpleasant for mother."

"Regret it!" I said. "That shows how little you know me. You've miscalculated there. You'll do the regretting before I'm through." I stood there for a moment staring at her with sheer hatred, then I turned on my heel and walked out.

I pushed my way through the street scarcely seeing where I was going. There were tears streaming down my cheeks, and I could hear my heart in my ears. When I reached home I emptied all my drawers and pulled all my clothes out of the closet. I was going away. I didn't know where, but I was going. Everything was beginning to blur, my mouth was very dry and my tongue felt leathery and rough. I don't think I even tried to pack. I began to undress, instead. The last thing I remember was the impression that my temples were collapsing with the walls of the room. I don't know how many days I was feverish and unconscious. I remember seeing Madame Grille's face from time to time and feeling the oppressive dampness of my bedclothes. When I finally recovered consciousness, I woke up with a curious feeling in my head, an emptiness, a blackness, a kind of peace. Then suddenly, without knowing why, I jumped out of bed and began to dress. I stumbled down the steps and out into the street with my legs scarcely supporting me. I was on my way to see Anna. I was seized, drawn, compelled to return to that house!

I rang the bell. No one answered. I rang and rang again. Then I tried the door. It was locked. This time they wouldn't keep me out! I began forcing the knob. I would break the door down if necessary. I had to get in. But it was useless, the door would never yield. Then it occurred to me to try the window. It was while I was prying the shutters open that I had the strange sensation that all of this had happened before. I distinctly remembered climbing into that house through the window. I was still slightly feverish and the thought turned me chill. I began to tremble so, my foot almost slipped on the ledge. Then, without considering the consequences, I broke a pane of glass with my elbow, opened the lock and jumped into the drawing-room. It was deserted. The furniture was in all the accustomed places but was covered with white sheets. I ran from room to room looking for them without knowing why. Something was driving me and now, of course, I know it was the memory of what I had done. Once again, I had the sensation of having experienced all this before, as though I had dreamt it. They were gone. They had disappeared.

I returned to the street. It was extraordinary that no one had seen me. I might have been caught by the police. I might have been arrested. The thought of it made me sweat. I could hear myself making futile, implausible explanations at the station. I could see myself in a cell. And then suddenly, everything became clear. I could feel my hands at her throat again. I recalled it all vividly now. It was not the window I had used that first time, but the door. I had pried it open. With what? That doesn't matter. What I remember is still fragmentary, but as intense and detailed as the memory in the midst of my fever, of my doctor's pock-marked face or of Madame Grille standing at my bedside emptying a powder into a glass of water. The darkness and silence of the house. The green tiers of carpeting on the stairs. The sudden light on the floor-landing, and then, the sound of the old woman wheezing and panting in her sleep. The connecting door between her room and Anna's was open and I could see Anna lying there like a figure on a fountain, an arm flung behind her head, her hair falling loose over her throat and her young bosom swelling the edge of her nightdress. I ran to her and flung myself at her throat. I shall never forget how she cried out for help. Calm, aloof Anna kissed my hands, promised me anything. It was degrading. I despised it. And then the old woman came into the room, still yawning and toothless, standing there half asleep, shrieking and waving her arms in the air, calling for the police again and again as she did that day in the park, then pleading and begging for mercy. "You saved my life once. Don't harm Anna. You love Anna. You love her."

I have relived that scene often, since that day on the street, and I have never regretted it. It is the only thing, I think, which has kept me from going mad. Don't misunderstand me, I have no sense of guilt, no remorse. I was justified, more than justified. In the eyes of God I know that I am innocent and I shall not give myself up. Let the police come and find me. That, after all, is their job. In the end I know they will. As soon as Madame Grille tires of her game. She tells me I haven't left my room since I've been sick, since that day the letter didn't come, but this morning when she brought my tea-tray (yes, I am accepting her small favors again—what can I do, she has me at her mercy!) I saw that *look* in her eyes. I saw the spiders. She knows. I don't know how she found out, but she knows. . . .

ROBERT RAMSEY

Fingers

Between the two men in the poor room there was only the difference of perhaps five years, and a little difference in the clothes they wore, as though one were dressed for some occasion and the other dressed for work. The elder wore a tie and a white shirt with a wilted collar and crumpled, sweat-stained sleeves; the other wore overalls, faded by the sun and much washing. About the necks and hands and faces of them there was that glared, fierce stain of the skin from many hours in the sun.

Beside them on a table there was a stiff new bag, of the kind carried by doctors. The man in the white shirt reached out his hand and took the bag.

He said, "It ain't like you had the money coming, Harper. It ain't like you had a crop to draw against until fall. I just ain't got no chance to get my money back, this way."

Harper said, "But Dr. Bean, I . . ."

"I already put more on credit than I can afford. Medicine and gasoline, coming out here. It counts up. Maybe you don't know how much it costs, practising medicine. Maybe you wouldn't believe it, but I still owe on that two years at that school in Kansas City."

"Yessir, I know that. I know it takes money. And I aim to pay—"

"And then on top of that finding out that the law wouldn't let me practise in but one state, and that they ain't none too glad about it here—"

"Yessir, I know that, Dr. Bean. Ever'body's got to have their money."

"So I just can't afford to be putting out medicine on credit, and gasoline coming out here. Not when I'm taking such a chance on getting it back."

"But I aim to pay you, Dr. Bean. Hit ain't like—"

"Look. Do you know how much it took to go to that place two years?"

"No, sir. Plenty, I reckon."

"Well, I still owe them two hundred dollars. That'll just give you an idea. And maybe you'll understand why I can't keep coming out here on credit when I got all that to pay back."

From the next room the woman wailed softly. It was a patient, muted sound.

"Anyway, what did you leave your crop for to go work in a sawmill?" the doctor said.

"I wanted to make me some money, Dr. Bean. Some steady wages . . ."

"If you'd of kept your crop you'd have a little credit for things like this."

"I wanted me some steady wages. I thought hit might be better'n what I been gitting ever' year. So when them fellers come and put up that new sawmill . . ."

"I reckon I can understand that. It's little enough a man ever gets out of working another man's crop."

"But I didn't know then them fellers in town was going to come and garnishee me on my pay check, as soon as they knowed about hit. To git back a grocery bill I owed two year ago. I didn't know about that. And as soon as I git hit paid, I'll . . ."

"Yes. Well, that's the trouble. And I can't come any more unless you've got the money in your hand."

"Yessir—"

"I'm sorry, but it won't do any good unless you've got the cash money."

The doctor left, and Harper from the door watched the old Ford wheel slowly out of the yard and bounce over the unpaved street to disappear in the direction of the town.

He went back into the room with his wife.

He sat down by the bed, touching his wife's face, stroking it.

She said, "Harper."

"Is hit bad now?"

"I felt hit right smart a while back, but that shot he give me eased me some. Hit pains right smart without that . . . I reckon the chap's beginning to move around now."

She smiled weakly and he touched her hair, feeling its softness flowing out over the pillow.

"Honey," he said, "are you sorry we left Mr. Rick's?"

"No, Harper," she said. "Hit's like you said. We done come up in the world right smart, I reckon."

"Yes," he said. He tried to make it sound as when he had said it before. "Do you want anything, honey?"

"My head's hot," she said. "I would sho' like to have me some ice."

"I can't git you no ice, honey. I'll git some cool water."

He went out into the back yard, into the still hot air left baking by the afternoon sun, and pumped furiously and steadily until the flow of water ran cool. He caught a bucket of the water and took it in to his wife, and soaked a rag in the water to place on her forehead.

"Mrs. Harper Dorman," she said softly. "Hit's a purty name. Even after being married seven months hit still sounds purty. . . ."

He awakened before daylight the next morning and crept softly from the bed and stood looking down at his wife's swollen face.

He cooked his breakfast of side-meat and cornpone and molasses, and before he left put a cold bucket of water with the breakfast on the chair by the bed.

He was so worried when he got to the sawmill that the foreman spoke to him twice. He was the off-bearer, one of several men who stand before the whirling saw to take the clean planks from the saw as it rips them out from the moving log. He was so worried that before he had been there an hour he reached in too far for the plank and the saw flicked off his index finger at the second joint. He hardly felt it, and he looked down curiously at the stub of his finger, pink, a faint blue where the end of the severed bone showed. Then the blood began showing in faint pricks at first; then it flowed out bright red and fell to the ground.

The foreman came up and cursed. He took a bit of resin from the log on the saw carriage and stuck it on the end of Harper's finger and hurried him, stumbling, out of the mill and into a car.

"Where do you aim to take—" Harper said.

"To the doctor, you bastard; where do you think?"

"But I can't pay; I ain't—"

"You ought to pay it, anybody that would be dumb enough to stick their hand in front of a saw. But you don't have to; the insurance company'll pay for it."

On the way back from the doctor, Harper said, "I'm right beholden to you for the doctor. For—"

"Hell, it ain't us; it's the insurance company," the foreman said. "They'll pay for it; not us."

When they got to the mill the foreman went into his office shed and brought out a typed sheet of paper.

"This is so everything will be all right," he said.

He spread the paper out on a plank and gave Harper a fountain pen. Harper made a cross on the paper where the foreman showed him, and the foreman and another man signed the paper underneath Harper's cross.

At Harper's house that night there was a man waiting in a car. The man was a lawyer. Harper had seen him a few times, standing on the steps of the courthouse, and on the streets.

"Hello, Harper," the lawyer said pleasantly. "I hear you had a little accident."

"Not much of one, I reckon," Harper said, standing impatiently and without interest, wanting furiously to go into the house.

"Anybody say anything to you about it" the lawyer said. "Anybody ask anything?" He looked at Harper sharply, in his face a kind of questioning more intent than in his words.

"I don't recall nobody," Harper said slowly. "The foreman seen it, the doctor seen it. . . ."

"What doctor?"

"I don't rightly know his name. Some doctor for the sawmill people."

"Who else?"

"Nobody. That's all, I reckon." Harper's face was pained with the effort of remembering.

"I see," the lawyer said. "And nobody gave you any money?"

"No, sir," Harper said, as though he thought the man expected him to respond in that way, as to a joke. "No, sir. I'd like to see somebody come handing me some money. Yessir, I'd be right proud to see that."

"Just a minute. Nobody offered you any money. And you didn't sign anything, any kind of paper—?"

"Yes," Harper said. "A kind of paper. I . . ."

The lawyer cursed.

"All right. You signed it, and they didn't even give you anything for signing it. Is that it?"

"Yessir. Why? You mean I done wrong. . . ?"

"Listen, you poor bastard," the lawyer said, "don't you know that in this state the law doesn't protect a man who works for a company and gets hurt? That he's got to go to the law himself for protection?"

"I don't know about that. But I figger that courts are mostly for fellers with money; that a poor man ain't got no business going into court. . . ."

Harper was already withdrawn, his mind and attention withdrawn and closed behind suspicion and a kind of visionless independence.

"All right," the lawyer said, "all right. That's enough." He clamped his mouth down, and Harper heard his foot kick the starter into a whirring sound. Then the car was veering out in a wide arc through the yard and back into the street again and Harper went into the house, the man and his ideas already forgotten now in his urgent haste.

His wife's face was hot. She moaned a little when he bent over the bed, and then she looked up at him and he saw that she meant to smile.

"Hit ain't too much for you, honey?" he said.

"Hit hurt right smart today."

Harper kept his hand behind him, or in his pocket.

Then he wife said, "Ain't they something wrong, Harper?"

"No. Nothing's wrong. Don't fret."

"Harper, you ain't lost your job, have you?"

"No. They ain't nothing wrong."

He brought in another bucket of cold water and sat by the edge of the bed, laying the cool cloths on her forehead.

It was three days before the stranger came out from the insurance office in Memphis.

He got out of his car and went first to the foreman, talking a little while, looking at Harper where he stood by the saw carriage. Then they came up to Harper and the stranger said, "Let's see that finger."

Harper stuck out the finger, timidly, a little worried.

"Well, it's not so bad. Hell, you're right lucky. What if it was your whole hand?" the stranger said.

"I don't know, sir," Harper said. "I reckon hit—"

"What do you think it's worth?" the stranger said.

Harper said, "Worth—?"

"What about twenty-five dollars?" the stranger said. "That's a lot of money, twenty-five dollars cash."

"Yes," Harper said, suspiciously.

The stranger took out a billfold and put five five-dollar bills on the saw carriage by Harper, very close to him. "Now," he said, "just sign this paper for me now. Just to show everything's all right."

He took out a typed sheet of paper and showed Harper where to make his mark, and then the foreman and another man signed the paper.

"Now, you want to take good care of that hand," the stranger said. "Maybe you ought to take the rest of the day off."

"Why, hit's all right—" Harper said.

"Sure," the foreman said. "It's a good idea."

"But I—"

"Go ahead on home," the foreman said. "Go on home and rest. You'll get a full day's pay. Hell, we want to take good care of our men." He looked at the stranger, and then both of them looked away from Harper slightly.

"That's right. He's right," the stranger said. "You go on and do like he says."

Harper walked into town first. It was only a little over a mile and a half. It was a little more than a mile to his house and then a half-mile into town. He wanted to see about his wife but he hurried on into town first.

He went to the grocers' that had turned over his account to the courthouse for collection and gave them fifteen dollars. The man looked at the money suspiciously and then gave Harper a receipt. Harper had only owed them for eight dollars worth of groceries, but by the time he had taken it to the courthouse and they had added on a collection fee and their interest the bill was eighteen dollars.

"Hit ain't but three dollars now, is it?" Harper said.

The man looked into a ledger. "Three dollars," he said finally, closing the ledger and looking at Harper coldly. "Maybe you'll learn to pay your bills a little better next time."

"Yessir," Harper said. "I aimed to pay it, in the first place, only I had a little trouble."

Then he went to the doctor's office. He gave the doctor the other ten dollars. "Will you come now, Dr. Bean?" he said.

"No," the doctor said. "You still owe me five dollars more. You got to have that, and the money to pay me with for the next call, in advance, before I'll come again. I can't afford—"

"Yessir," Harper said, a little wearily now. "I reckon you know vour business; it looks to me though like it's hard on a poor man."

When Harper got home there was a quietness about the house. He stopped in the doorway of the room and looked at the bed, feeling the thunder of his heart in the stillness.

His wife moved her head weakly and he went to the bed, stumbling, his feet sounding heavy in the room.

"Praise God," he said.

"Harper," she said. "I want the doctor again. I think hit's might nigh time now."

"Can't you wait a little for him?" Harper said. "Maybe 'til the end of the week. Can't you wait that long?"

"I can't make hit wait, Harper. Hit's going to be time afore then, tomorrow, tonight, maybe."

Harper looked through the window dully. Then he stroked her head above the eyes.

"You get a good night's rest; I'll see about him for you tomorrow."

"Yes, Harper."

He sat by the bed quietly and stroked her head until she closed her eyes finally and went to sleep. Then he got up softly and went out of the house. It was three o'clock in the afternoon then, and in the glaring sun he walked the five miles out to the plantation.

He stood before the screened porch of Rick Lofton's house and called. After a while a man came out on the porch and stood looking through the screen.

Harper said, "Mr. Rick, please, I need some help."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Mr. Rick, I . . . I want to come back on your place. I done my best for you afore when I was here, and I reckon I made a mistake when I left, thinking . . ."

"I can't take you now. I haven't got a place for you now."

"But please, Mr. Rick. I want to come back. And I'll work hard. . . ."

"Sorry. It's too late in the season anyway. Crops are almost laid by. I couldn't make a deal with you this time of year. I'm sorry."

He turned and walked back into the house and left Harper alone in the sun again.

Harper walked back home. It was seven o'clock and his wife was still asleep. He cooked; it was the same meal again that he had eaten at breakfast. Then he went into the bedroom and slipped into the bed. He reached out his hand timidly once to touch his wife's face; then he turned on his side and slept.

He had already cooked his breakfast in the morning and was eating it when he heard his wife scream the first time. His face went white all over and the piece of cornbread hung in his throat as though it was going to be vomited even before it had time to reach his stomach.

He fled from the kitchen in a cold frenzy and stood open-mouthed above his wife. She smiled up at him with a trusting placid look.

"Will you get him now, Harper?" she said. "The doctor?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes."

He left his breakfast unfinished in the kitchen, and walked to work, although it was yet a half hour ahead of time.

It was ten o'clock before he could get to the insurance agent's office. It took him nearly an hour of the time to find the man's office, to find out who he was by describing him to men on the street and asking if they knew him and where his office was.

He stood in the man's office then, holding the rag-bound finger in his hand. Then he laid it on the desk, unaware of the man's revulsion and disbelief, standing with a patient courtesy by the desk, his hat held in his unmaimed hand, holding out the hand with two fingers gone now.

"You ain't the same man," Harper said. "The one that paid me afore. But being as you are with the same company I reckon hit's all the same. And I brung hit this time. The finger. I brung hit to make sure there wouldn't be no mistake."

"Good God," the man said softly, looking at Harper's face. "You carried that finger all the way in her to show—"

"Give me the paper now and I'll sign hit," Harper said. "If'n—"

"What paper? Sign what paper?" the man said.

"Please," Harper said. "I got to git the money quick. If'n hit ain't too much trouble, I mean—"

"Wait. What paper are you talking about and what money?"

"I don't know what hit said, the paper. But hit was for the money, when the man for the insurance company give me the money the time I cut the other finger off."

Now the man's eyes swerved down from Harper's face, turning to the desk and the aimless, still papers on it. "I see," he said. "Yes. You cut your finger off. Then the adjuster came out to see you. He settled—"

"Yessir, that's hit. He give me the money as soon as he come."

"And now you've cut off another finger and you expect me to pay you for it."

"Yessir. If'n hit ain't too much trouble. I would like to sign the paper and git the money now, this morning, without you or him having to come out to the sawmill to give hit to me."

"I see." The man picked up a pencil and held it, looking at it.

"Or if'n hit's too much trouble, or if'n you ain't got the money with you, if'n you would just give me a piece of paper saying I got hit coming, that would be all right. Hit would do just as good."

"Goddam," the man said suddenly. "You poor bastard, what do you think I am?"

Harper moved back a little, his eyes pained, uncomprehending.

"Sir? You mean . . . ain't I going to git hit. . . .?"

"Look. All I do is sell insurance policies and try to collect for them. I can't pay you for cutting off a finger."

"Yessir. But I figgered you worked for the company, and—"

"If anybody's going to give you any money for it, it'll be out of the claims department, where it came from the other time. All I could do is write them about it for you, but I guess your foreman's already done that, and maybe got you to sign a release, too. I don't guess he wasted much time doing that, before some jakeleg lawyer got hold of you—"

"Yessir. I done signed hit, the paper—"

"Well, that's all. I'll write the claims department. That's all I can do."

Harper stood looking at the man with his wide, bewildered eyes.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" the man said. "I can't do anything else, I said."

"Well, sir. Couldn't you give me a piece of paper saying I had hit coming—?"

"No. Goddam," the man said, shouted, almost.

"You got to. I got to have the money," Harper said. He stepped forward, raising his hand a little with a mute gesture of half-violence, already restricted and dead before the thought was fully expressed in the lifting hand.

The man moved back in the chair, watching what he thought to be the beginning of a threat.

"Go on," the man said. "Go on and get out. Trying to make trouble won't get you anywhere."

Harper's hand fell down slowly. Holding the shapeless hat, it came to rest along his leg. After a moment he said, "I don't aim to make no trouble. I reckon that's the last thing I want: any more trouble."

He turned away, moving slowly, leaving the office.

Walking in the morning sunlight, along the streets, and then beyond the houses, on the edge of town, he gradually became aware of words moving up into his mouth. He heard them, the words addressed to the air before his face, and they sounded hopeless and foolish and without meaning as he heard his mouth framing the sound of them. "Oh, God, don't let her die now. Not yet, anyway. There ain't no call for her to die now."

When he reached his wife her lips were already clawed back over her teeth in the still face, and there was a bad odor, a stench, all through the room.

He began waiting then in the room. He sat in a chair and all time, and the motion of his life waited, arrested and unstirring in the still room about him, unrecognized by him and not believed. Like a long wind that blew him back from the beginning and then died of its own inertia and dropped him in the still room, the mute fury of his waiting hung about him in the air. It was not a period of time that he was aware of; it was perhaps four hours.

Then he stirred and looked out placidly. He saw the empty hands across his legs; then he saw the people in the room with him, the men and women of the houses beyond him on the street. They looked at him with a kind of awe and fear as he stirred. Then they came to him and began to lead him from the room; he went with them into the other room and sat in another chair. He sat for a little while looking at them gratefully. He became aware of the lifting voices of the women in the bedroom; then he began to hear the sounds of carpentry from behind the house.

He said, "I done right. Can't no man say I ain't done all any man could do."

"No, Harper," one of the men said. "No man could of done more than you done. You put your mind at ease."

He sat with them, the sound of talking men and women around him, the sounds of the working men and the carpentry coming in from the yard. He sat with them, and the long wind began to brush his memory again; and his breath stirred with it and began to go fast.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER

Small Epic, Illustrating the Romance in Business Success

1.
Dad, a Harvard grad,
Ma, a Southern belle—
in a word,
with the collaborate cell
that evolved
into Tristram Tristram, Third,
eugenically,
all was well.
2.
The astrologer billed,
the heavens fulfilled
the Tristrams' hope;
as though counted
and coined,
the stars conjoined
into a perfect
horoscope.
3.
Financially too
the birth was auspicious;
silver spoons chimed
on golden dishes.
Tristram, senior,
did so well,
though data deployers,
accountants and lawyers,
covered up
his ledger tracks,
he still had to pay
some income tax.
4.
Salubrious too
the social climate;
the upper airs blew
in the Tristram heimat.
In mother's set
all the social-registered
sometimes met.
5.
With so many doors
for Destiny,
degree-men for ushers
at specialist fee,
yessing maids
to oil down friction—
no wonder the nursery
hummed with prediction.
When Tristram sang
not far off key
a great composer
he would be;
and an artist
instantly
when Tristram drew
a shoe-like shoe;
and a scientist
when he saw
snowflakes on a
window thaw;
not a this-and-that,
but a diplomat
when he served his end—
and asked a second helping
"for my friend."
6.
Five, six,
seven, eight,
help Tris inflate
in height and weight;
nine and ten,
and on again,

into years of the
junior gentlemen.
Then Tris is sent,
despite its immigrant
element,
to Harvard, still
to father's knowledge
the first college.

7.
Predictions,
muses,
dim away—
children's games
that adults play;
the Future
starts to age,
today.
Now reigns
last and duenna
of the muses;
the rigid goddess
on the coin
now chooses.
Engineering,
banking,
management,
law?—
Out of these, Tris,
your fortune draw.

8.
But Tris, he took
no note,
too busy sowing
his wild oat,
the Lincoln Highway
for his furrow,
a Lincoln coupé
to ride it thorough;
for fertilizer
caviar;
for irrigation,
Scotch, three star;
for helpers, sundry
night club pets,
in wild-oat husbandry
farmerettes.

9.
The most intoxicant
caress
comes as reward
for cleverness;
so, to impress
a somewhere brain
beneath a tress,
from time to time
Tris bought a rhyme
from a hard-up poet
who breathed, when bid,
a lower air
than the sublime,
as viz.:

Oh, your venida crest
and ah, your bemberg breast,
    And so forth, down;
your saks and zippered side,
where, m-m-m, the flexees glide
    And so forth, down,
to your red nailglo toe
prodding a heart below,
    And so forth, down.

Men come from Ort and Drouth
to kiss your hudnut mouth,
    all else forgot;
and grow a gray year older
when shrugs your russek shoulder
    all else forgot;
at psychoanalyst
you'll have an after-tryst
    —and nought forgot.

10.

Compare generations
in dissipations.
Father sowed
in nameless fields;
crops of headlines
the son's oat yields.

11.

Education
done,
vocation
none,
in fitness,
reliability,
everything,
—un;
yet dad
found an office
for his son.

12.

In that office
was a chair,
of his presence
it was bare;
on his desk
there was a phone,
germless as
a sun-dried bone.

13.

Alas for Tristram
Tristram, Third,
failure seems to be
the word.
Even his parents
fond and fain
think him an
unetherized
pain.

14.

Ah, marriage
heaven-sent,
habit-forming
sacrament;
drowsy hearth
and virtuous bed,
and up, little Tristrams,
to pat on the head;
birthdays to remember,
and visits to repay,
and telephoning
half the day;
and things to do
as thick as hair,
electric in
the domestic lair.
In marriage
the elder Tristrams thought
the younger might be
tamed, if caught.

15.

The plots proceed
at newsreel speed;
in newsmen bars
the spigots bleed;
there dad's press agents
do the deed.
Our hero balked,
but the whole town talked.
Up to the knees
in carefully sewered
winchellese,
Tristram, junior,
began to feel,
"maybe it's real?
And I and May
are that way."

16.
In this brief stanza
let it be stated,
the wedding soon
was celebrated
and Miamily
consummated.

17.
Allergic look,
and lovely to touch,
of heart, enough,
of mind, not too much,
rated a photo
2-col.
in Life,
May was a model
social-page wife.
She knew
the calibrated fervors
to put into
the how-dye-do;
to distinguish
(in bloods)
the richer deep
from the thinner blue;
knew the right shops,
right books,
right clubs,
the formulas,
(verbal)
for raptures
and snubs;
and alas for Tristram,
willing to be dim,
her perfectly accurate
sense of position
included ambition
for him.

18.
Unwilling and worried
poor Tristram was hurried
from languorous lateness
to galloping greatness;
and the stages between
next stanzas are seen.

19.
Fifth Avenue,
beautiful,
abominable
street;
straight
as stone masts
and steel-edge
neat;
empire atomized
to shops,
but still
imperial
in the drops.
Here some beggars
the walls
disgrace,
like the feudal
flea,
the feudal
lace;
for that
Fifth Avenue
never lost face.
Squeezed
East Side
and flattened
boroughs
tell the story—
where Fifth Avenue
sucks its glory.
These thoughts
our own;

Tristram's
elsewhere
take their tone.

20.
Tristram walked
the avenue down;
on his face
thought streaked
a frown;
Time was passing,
gone too soon;
round clocks
digesting
the afternoon.
Must he, careerless,
to her return
and earn
describing away
the day,
her acid-sweet
dismay?

21.
He saw
a loitering woman
to a brusque man
hooked,
whose angry hand
hasty
to hat-brim
crooked,
while backward
languid
the woman
looked.
Grimmer
the husband
towed ahead
guessing what memories
dragged her tread.

22.
Tris looked after
heated and pleased,
the world adjusted,
his pride appeased;
Like a prized letter
just re-read
her image
magnifies
in his head.
"Darling!"
the salutation
in her eye;
and in that vein
from neck to thigh.
Her voluble skirt
adds memories more,
the intimate sound
of the closing door.
And delicate feet
that step secure
leave
on his stare
her
signature.

23.
How well he recalls!
She had let his admiring hand
do its applausive part,
and followed, in place, with some
lecturing on her art.
"Modern design," she had said,
"is badly in arrears.
How long must women wait
for cellophane brassières!"
"Not long!" he calls after
"my sweet, impatient dear,"
and filled with inspiration
visions his CAREER!

24.
Dad, though skeptical,
put up the capital,
thinking it safer
to stake such a gamble,
than to pay double
for probable amble
of too idle son
into debil of trouble.

25.
Announcement to the trade,
New Undie Sensation
(Patent applied for)
Sure to sweep nation.
Lingerie trade cheers
INVISIBLES—
new cellophane
brassières.

26.
Subsidize
big store
half-page ads;
take full pages
in women's mags;
hire bedroom voice
to hint to milady-o
over the radio;
and team of fags
in two-time gags;
get Public Relations
to arrange,
for the publicity,
or a little change,
film stars to wear it,
most oomphenic;
doctors to swear it,
most hygienic.

27.
"Invisible hands
mould new beauty,
unseen guards
at their duty;
delicately toned
to every skin,
flattery
their only sin.
News—
        flash!—
America's women
choose—
        dash—
INVISIBLES!"

28.
A moral quite
as evident
as in the rose
its rosy scent,
distills, I trust
from this small tale;
else your poet
grieves, "I fail."
Moral: that from breeding
comes the leading.
Dad, a Harvard grad,
Ma, a Southern belle,
eugenical—
        financial—
            social-
                ly,
all was well.
Though Fate for a time
did digress,
preordained
was this success.
True, when predictions rained
there dropped
no guess
that of this labeled blood
and weedless breeding
the fruit succeeding,

would appear—
the cellophane
brassière!

29.
Good readers all
my tale is done,
though we can add
to make it complete
a toothful of romance,
—a final sweet.
But for the purpose
for some lines on
you must become
a peeping-Tom.
All to the keyhole;
there, at your eyes,
recognize?—
the lady from stanza
twenty-one,
from whom the fateful
thought was spun?
Sweetly she sits
at her toilette,
with her mirror-self, playing
a duet.
Rarely have hands
heaped richer ware
than her fleet fingers
in her gold hair;
rarely did whiteness
brighter bloom
than her raised arms
lighting the room;
and never, in fact,
will peeping-Toms be
better repaid
for aching knee.
Suddenly turning,
stooping, rising. . . .
this in her hands,
so tenderly prizing,
opening it
and holding clear
the gleaming bubbles
of a cellophane
brassière:
Ears to the keyhole,
quick!
Hear her reverent
rhapsody,
"Dearest boy
did it
for me,
for me!"

MORTON FINEMAN

Possess One World

Now the block-lettered green neon sign that hung down in the window of MacGlusker's Shamrock Bar was turned off, and the large venetian blind was down. Mike came out of the bar and stood on the pavement before crossing the street to the all-night delicatessen for the sandwiches he'd been sent out to buy. The strong September sea breeze passed through his loosely woven summer suit, whipping against his spare narrow unathletic body, and flattened his dark longish hair against his head. He stood, his hands deep in his pockets, and rocked slightly, full of a woozy effulgence, thinking happily of the dynamics of Scotch whiskey.

The window lights of the delicatessen store formed patterns on the pavement. The man who owned the store stood by the window, staring at the wide flat bare Atlantic City boardwalk only two blocks away; his head bowed as if he'd fallen asleep in the midst of prayer, or been lulled by the low boom of the surf.

The roisterous quality had gone out of the night; the hard swift after-sundown pace had ended; the twilight inexhaustability collapsed like a hollow dream. The open-sided car going to Ventnor passed slowly in the street as if bespeaking the end of all bright myths of the night, the end of enchantment, the ache and creak of the end of things.

As Mike recrossed the street to MacGlusker's, carrying the bag of corned beef sandwiches and pickles, he saw the vast unfalterable glare of the neon sign atop Steel Pier still burning. The stillness, the emptiness of the night and the nearness of his wife, Helen, sitting there in the Shamrock with MacGlusker and Lajos, waiting for him to return with the sandwiches, filled him with a fabulous happiness, for within him, building itself up out of the swift turns of this new autumnal sea wind, was a matured and incandescent memory of other autumn nights . . . those long directionless ambles he'd gone on with Helen; the times when she always wore those plaid skirts and long-sleeved sweaters and that dark loose coat with the stubborn belt, and her wide mouth when he'd stop suddenly to kiss her with unabashed gladness, full of a plasticity of happiness. Those autumn nights the wind had been cool, too, full of the dry sharp sweetness of seasonal change, and the nights themselves had spun their gossamer of dark and cloistered enchantment under the aegis of that autumn sky. The leaves on the pavement, when they'd walked over them, stirred and spun by the wind, had given forth a tender unending litany of sound.

He had to smile when he remembered that Helen had said she wanted a little boy, so she would have two of them, himself and the boy. She was so damned pretty this girl he had married, he thought, with that short nose and those luminous eyes and that sleek dark hair and the way she could wear a ten-dollar dress so that it looked as if it came right out of Bergdorf Goodman. It was the womanliness of her more than anything that he loved.

Mike opened the door to the Shamrock with the key MacGlusker had given him and walked back to the table where they were waiting for him. He dumped the bag on the table and slid into the chair next to Helen. He smiled hesitantly at her; he touched her arm lightly, feeling the fine texture of her skin. She grinned at him.

"Mellow, darling?" she asked.

"Mellow," he whispered.

She put her arm around his waist and pinched the flesh on his ribs.

MacGlusker and Lajos were sitting across the table. MacGlusker tilted his chair back against the wall and reached out for the sandwiches. He passed the bag around. A troubled melancholy expression was on his big clean-sculpted face as he chewed. He looked at the clock on the wall. Then his large clear eyes looked at Mike and Helen, finally at Lajos who sat alertly in his chair, like a wise energetic fox terrier.

"It's an electric clock," Lajos said. "Don't worry, it keeps good time."

MacGlusker fell silent. Finally he said, "The sandwich is good." His thick sandy hair and the smoothness of his face made it difficult to judge his age, and Lajos too had that ageless quality. He had been drinking more than the others, but he possessed the ability that some little lean men have of seeming more and more brightly imperishable as they drink.

The four of them had been together all night. MacGlusker had invited Mike and Helen to spend the evening with him and his friend Lajos and somebody named Moxel who had not showed up yet.

MacGlusker looked at the clock again and said to Lajos, "Listen, Moxel was supposed to come here two hours ago for a pinochle game." To Mike he said, "I wanted you to meet him."

"Who is Moxel?" Mike asked.

"He used to be a waiter for me when I had a taproom in Philadelphia; now he drives a taxi here," MacGlusker said, fondly.

Lajos picked up the bag and took out a large sour pickle. He held it aloft and exclaimed, "All of us are going to be good cases for a stomach pump."

"We used to have a lot of fine times in Philadelphia," MacGlusker said, "me and Moxel and Lajos; we used to have some gang; everybody used to write the numbers, and everybody was related to Chester Tondetelli, the magistrate. You never saw anything like it. Nobody ever got booked by

Chester. Every year Chester used to give a big dinner and send out invitations printed: Chester Tondetelli's Memorial Dinner. Remember, Lajos?" He grinned, "With Louis Middle of the Road, and Two Finger and Lover Pascatello and Ike Arondo and Bongadero, and all the ladies from Erb Street, and everybody got drunk.

"I don't see Moxel so often now," MacGlusker explained to Mike. "I don't understand why he should be late for a pinochle game." His voice had a puzzled uncertain tone.

"Maybe he was too tired?" Helen said. It was a time of night when Helen was unconcerned about everything except being close to Mike. Her arm was still tightly around his waist. She looked drowsily at MacGlusker.

"He is never too tired for a pinochle," Lajos said.

"He is so high," MacGlusker broke in gently. He raised his hand. "And he will fight anything—just like a little bull terrier. Someday he wants to buy a little Russian bath someplace and any time I want, he says, I can come in and get a *plateza*. A good *plateza,* he says, can fix anything. He worries about the Russians," MacGlusker continued warmly. "He put a radio in his cab so he could listen to the war news. His wife says it is bad enough he stays up all night to play pinochle with me and Lajos, but she is not going to stand his high blood-pressure over the Russians too."

"A man with principles always has to fight his wife," Lajos murmured slyly, grinning at Helen whose head was against Mike's shoulder.

Helen said, "Baloney," very softly.

The telephone started to ring.

"Moxel!" MacGlusker cried. He arose and walked to the booth, leaving the door open.

"Yeah," they heard him say; his voice had neither the intonations of recognition nor the impatient genialness of greeting. They could see MacGlusker's tall squared body, filling the booth; his large head bent to the mouthpiece. His face, profiled over the mouthpiece, contracted into harsh eloquent lines, giving to the three of them that watched and listened the foreknowledge of his words about what they and he knew was unhappy and bitter before he even spoke into the black round sensitive tube, heated by his breath, that carried not only his laconic acknowledgment of what was being told him with official coolness, but plunged the involuntary and outraged hiss of his breath across the dark buried wires to the spokesman of disaster.

They heard him say, "Thanks," and smash the receiver onto the hook, and come back to them.

"It was the Atlantic City hospital," he explained. "Three men beat up

Moxel." He sat down. "He told them at the hospital they should call me up. He wants me to tell his wife." He looked at the three of them. "I guess that is the pinochle," he said slowly.

"Beaten up?" Helen said. Her body had gone tense against Mike's.

"Why?" Mike asked uncomprehendingly. "Why should he get beat up?"

"Principles," MacGlusker explained tersely.

Mike looked at him and then at Lajos who was sitting stiffly, smiling calmly and murderously.

"It had to happen sooner or later," Lajos said. "He is too small and too old to be pugnacious the way he is about principles."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand," Mike insisted. "Maybe it's all the Scotch. But a man was beaten up. What does it have to do with principles?"

Mike could see MacGlusker with his large head bowed, looking stonily at him, and Lajos, whose smile had the chill glitter of stainless steel. It was warm in the empty bar with the shadows of the chairs up on the tables and the soft sparkling of the night light over the bar as it fell and reflected itself on the rows of whiskey bottles. It was intimate; it was an hour and a place for confidences, and the echo of their former words still filled Mike; the jokes they'd had about his anniversary when Helen and he had first come in, the innumerable times they'd toasted him and Helen—all the warm pulsebeat of friendship and talk that had linked them and given shape and contour to the evening.

Now the silence was chill and imminent.

Then he heard Lajos say, "Principles is a word that explodes like dynamite. To have principles today you have to be six feet tall and weigh two hundred pounds and punch like Joe Louis."

Lajos' voice gouged him like barbed wire; there was a new vague hardness in it, from a source heretofore hidden, or at least not discovered by him; almost a sober kind of foreknowledge that this would happen, and had, and that, in a grim way it was humorous even to have to explain it all to anyone.

Mike could feel MacGlusker staring at him, whose head was still inclined, whose large friendly mouth was now shut harsh against inestimable rage.

For a few moments longer the silence held, as each meditated without looking at the other—as though afraid to discover the honest grief and bewilderment that arose there. And gradually the truth gained the irrevocable proportions it needed to make speech, even full of justified foresight, possible again.

MacGlusker spoke first; the words broke from him, striking through the silence of the others.

"A dozen times," he said, "I told that little fathead, that little pinochle sharp, that whack, that gatemouth—don't get into fights; don't have so many principles. If you get your head split open, I said, you'll never buy that Russian bath." He ended as abruptly as he'd begun; his lips came together slowly as though their contact pained him.

"But go talk to Moxel," Lajos said quietly.

"Yes, go talk to him," MacGlusker muttered. "If my own brother had his head split open I could not feel worse."

"But who did it?" Mike asked.

"Three men," MacGlusker answered sarcastically.

"Why didn't the police do anything?" Helen wanted to know.

"The police—" Lajos exclaimed, "they probably made a record of it and will ask him to take out a warrant."

"They knocked his teeth out," MacGlusker said brokenly. "Jesus Christ, they knocked his teeth out and he likes to eat hard salami sandwiches."

"What are you going to do?" Mike asked.

"Find them," MacGlusker stated. "And then I am going to split open their heads—like cocoanuts."

Mike felt Helen tremble beside him.

"He can take them apart like a butcher takes apart the carcass of a steer."

❧

Mike did not want to stare, but whenever he turned his eyes the image of Moxel on the bed, his head swathed in bandages down to the tops of his eyebrows, seemed incomplete—as if by looking once more he would discover another detail. When Moxel's dark alert eyes met his, with their sardonic glitter, knowing and judging, he tried to smile sympathetically. He felt ashamed of being dressed as if he were going to take a morning constitutional on the boardwalk. For an appalling instant he thought Moxel would ask him if he played charades or mah jong. But mostly he was shocked to find Moxel so old. He was only a year or so younger than Mike's father, but he possessed that supple resistant quality of well tanned leather, that hard durability of a peasant.

"Even here," Moxel said. His lips were puffed. He tried to talk without moving his lips. "Even here," he repeated, "I can smell it."

"Smell what?" Mike asked.

Moxel grinned sourly. "Hot dogs and sunburn lotion. Even the Lysol can't kill it."

"Listen," MacGlusker said sharply. He was sitting in the chair drawn close to the bed. "Don't be so sharp for a minute. What happened? I want to find out what happened. Flat on his back with seven stitches in his dumb head and he's still sharp!"

Moxel looked at all of them, then grimaced again with that painful puffed and sour expression. "Don't rush me. All the time you rush me. Even when I sit down for a pinochle."

"All right," MacGlusker said in a strained tender voice. "How do you feel now?"

"Like a chopped herring," Moxel answered. "Four teeth are out. Four of my best teeth."

"How did it happen?" MacGlusker asked.

"I was parked in front of the Willard, so the three of them come out with a cupcake—she's one of the cashiers in the hotel. They were all going somewhere to a party. They get in the cab so I turn on the radio, figuring, all right, they look like a good fare, and the party is way the hell out. Well it happens it's a newsbroadcast and I figure it's only a couple minutes and then there is plenty of music on the Dawn Patrol. So all of a sudden, one of them hollers: 'Turn that goddamned thing off.' Listen, I think, to myself, I don't have to take that tone of voice, good fare or no good fare. I am entitled to a certain amount of respect."

Moxel wet his lips and went on: "I leave the radio on. So one of them leans over and says, 'Yussel, we want the radio off.' To me," Moxel told them, "nobody talks like Humphrey Bogart. The radio I tell them is for my amusement. 'The radio is off, Yussel,' he tells me again.

"All right," Moxel worked his lips into that grimace again. "I pull up to the curb, I stop the cab, I get out, I open the door, I say, 'Out, please, end of the line.' "

Moxel stopped again. The whitened end of his tongue ran over his lips. "It hurts in the chest if I talk too much. The girl is nervous. She tells them, please, get back in the cab; she apologizes to me for the insult; she says they are late already. But they don't say a word; they just get out and stand there and look at me and then at each other.

" 'A dollar sixteen,' I explain. 'The meter reads a dollar sixteen.'

" 'Including the radio?' the big mouth asks.

" 'Everything,' I explain, 'for the complete service.'

"Still, they are quiet. Then the girl starts to cry, but they just stand there. Then one of them says, 'Yussel is a character.'

"I don't like the way he is saying Yussel. On the boardwalk, I tell them, for ten cents I can get myself analyzed. A dollar sixteen please.

" 'Listen,' the big mouth says, 'you just rolled crap.'

"I don't say another word," Moxel said. "He wants his gums pumped in, he comes to the right guy."

All of them were silent. But Moxel did not go on; his hands relaxed over the front of the blanket. He looked at MacGlusker and Mike and Lajos, then he looked fondly at MacGlusker again.

"Leave it to me," MacGlusker said, finally. The sleeves of his old sport coat were too short and they showed his thick tanned wrists. "Superman," he exclaimed, "you have to be a superman, don't you?"

"Listen," Moxel murmured, "when you find them, the blond one, he's the one with the big mouth."

"All right," MacGlusker answered. "I'll pay special attention to him; the blond will be my meat."

Seated between Lajos and MacGlusker in the old Dodge Mike felt better; he could not explain why nor could he help that secret feeling of shame that had risen in him when Moxel's alert sardonic eyes had fastened themselves on him, seeing, he felt, plainly and deeply into the uneasiness beneath that impression of final resolute decision he'd want to give. He was thinking too much, he thought silently. But there was nothing to do about thinking now except to let it go on; before, it had been apparently easy to stop thinking.

The bright late morning sun striking the windshield obliquely made him blink his eyes, and he stared out of the side window speculatively, at the city. As they drove, the city had a melancholy quality of impermanence that was stronger even than its architectural ugliness or its spurious impression of ease. It passed by: a dreary simulation of what it wanted to be, bright, frantic and oppressive in the tawny rays of the morning sun.

Mike turned abruptly to Lajos and MacGlusker. "All along I had a feeling Moxel was going to ask me if I ever played charades."

"What the hell is charades?" MacGlusker demanded absently.

"A game," Mike said softly and wearily. "A game all my friends like to play on Sunday night, after Brahms. We played it the first time I met my wife."

"Do you play it with cards?" MacGlusker asked.

Before Mike could answer he caught Lajos' swift amused glance and smiled back with a trace of comfort. "No," he said, "with words."

"What the hell are you talking about?" MacGlusker demanded.

They turned the corner and went halfway down the block, and MacGlusker stopped the car.

Mike looked out at the large pale-brown building lined with precisely spaced windows and pale-yellow venetians, and at the ornate entrance. It was an expensive hotel much better than the one he was staying in with Helen.

"What are we going to do?" Mike asked.

"See the girl," MacGlusker said.

"You better let me go in to her," Lajos said to MacGlusker. "You're too excited."

MacGlusker smiled at Lajos and nodded.

"Do you want me to go in with you?" Mike asked.

"No," Lajos said. "One is plenty."

He opened the door of the car and got out, and walked briskly across the pavement, through the double doors, pushing them aside simultaneously—looking, to Mike, like a small dapper numbers writer, except for his peculiarly inappropriate little beard.

MacGlusker turned half around in his seat and brought out a package of cigarettes.

Mike sensed the cigarettes were the preparatory gesture to questioning. He could feel it in MacGlusker's bold guileless stare. He knew it would not be very subtle and he began to smile, very wanly though, as MacGlusker continued to peer at him, and then asked, "Why are you getting mixed up in this?"

Mike did not stir out of his reflective silence. He was not capable, he thought, of a long-winded explanation just now; and if he should make the effort he did not know how it would sound. Besides, he was tired. The visit to Moxel had been physically wearying. A softer voice, a pair of gentler less worldly eyes, the features not etched so deeply with knowledge, and Moxel would resemble his father. But that was sentimental, he thought, chiding himself, as he stared back at MacGlusker, who still waited for an answer. All old men, he thought, aroused sympathy; they all had a way of looking alike.

"I'm tired, Mac," he apologized. "I'll tell you afterwards, I mean I'll try. We only got a few hours' sleep last night."

He needed to gather himself together; he was raw inside. Talking about it would be remedial; but he was too shaken, too depleted by Moxel's account of the fight. In the Shamrock when the call from the hospital had come, there had been an air of unreasonableness about the truth. Men were not hoodlums. Or maybe there was the hoodlum in all of us?

When he'd faced Moxel a little while ago he'd felt genuine horror at the wantonness of the beating, its deliberateness, the utter uselessness of it. There had been a pounding and exhausting anger in him as he'd regarded

Moxel, lying there ugly and beaten and cheerfully bitter, saying it hurt his chest to talk too much.

He remembered Moxel saying, "I didn't like the way the big mouth was saying Yussel."

Yes, they were cold men with their cold hatreds in their cold fish-hearts who moved in a silent agony of barbarism; who had countenance for neither misery, nor martyrdom, nor pain, nor memory of familiar things, because countenance had been finished, spent, allayed. They had moved into the bright world quietly, extinguishing a light occasionally. They had fish-hearts and they wanted the darkness of the sea.

Mike's glance had wandered, and as he looked back he saw MacGlusker regarding him with a baffled expression.

Neither of them had seen Lajos come out of the hotel, but now they looked intently at him.

"What did she say?" MacGlusker's voice had hardened again.

"She's a fine girl. She moves her behind like there is a set of ball bearings placed somewheres inside. She is sorry about Moxel. She asked me if she ought to visit him at the hospital. I told her it would be all right. She's willing to help us; she's not afraid of them. She's goodnatured and kind and a little stupid; she's the kind of woman who likes to sleep naked on fresh sheets every night just for the pleasure. I told her the first thing we wanted was to see them, and then we would make plans. So she promised to call us up when they are at the bar in the hotel. You see, they always come here to drink. That's how she met them."

"How long are they going to stay?" MacGlusker asked.

"She doesn't know. We'll have to figure out something right away."

"How are you going to get them out of the bar?" Mike asked curiously. "You can't start anything in the bar, and you can't just trail them around until they're alone."

"We want them together, all together, at once," MacGlusker stated.

"I know," Lajos said, musingly. "I have an idea."

MacGlusker stared gloomily at the entrance as though it were an unapproachable barrier. "The bastards might leave tonight, then we'll never get them," he muttered. He tossed his cigarette out the window. "Everything is complicated," he said. "Every time you want to do a decent thing, it's complicated."

"There were three fat ladies in slacks," Lajos said, "sitting by a window and listening to a portable radio and eating taffy. It was a news broadcast.

They were eating taffy, and I was thinking about that girl's rump. We are just ordinary men, that's why the decent things are complicated."

* * *

Mike stood in his bathrobe by the opened window rubbing the back of his neck with slow intent motions.

"Salt air," he said to Helen with more harshness than he meant, "here is your salt air."

Helen remained quiet in the big chair Mike had pushed in front of the window for her. Finally she asked softly, "Can I have a cigarette?"

Mike watched the glare of the match form tiny highlights on her wide high primitive cheekbones and form little spotlights of illumination under her large greyish-green eyes, watched then the smoke making her nostrils flare out.

"Mike," she said after a while, quietly and deliberately, "please don't feel wretched. It's one of those things. The way things are today it'll happen many times."

For a few seconds Mike did not take his eyes off the boardwalk he could see from the window where the lights still burned into the dark sky. A solution, he thought, it's one of those things, yeah, thank God for the historical perspective. He turned around and faced Helen.

"This afternoon when we were sitting on the beach," he said huskily, "I was thinking everybody looks so clean and healthy and sunburned. Everybody has the same formula for living: plenty of sex, plenty of sunburn and Steel Pier every night. I thought, I'm going to enjoy my wedding anniversary. I'm not going to look at a paper; I'm not going to think about the Russians; I'm not going to give a damn about supplies to England. The hell with having an inquiring mind for just a couple days."

Mike stopped and looked gloomily out the window.

"Should I take the historical point of view, and say, all right, let's go to bed." He lit a cigarette and came toward Helen. He put his hand on her knee. "You should have seen him," he said. "He lay on that bed swollen and puffed, without teeth. Why? Goddamn it, why?"

Mike straightened up. "What did he ever do? Did he ever hurt anybody? Did he take up too much room on the earth?"

"You want to go with MacGlusker, don't you?" Helen said.

"Yes, I want to go with MacGlusker. He's willing to go alone but I'm going to ask him."

"You can't fight," Helen said. "You don't know anything about fighting."

"That's right," Mike answered bitterly. "When did I ever stop to learn how to fight?"

"You're talking yourself into it," Helen said.

"Yes, I'm talking myself into it," Mike repeated.

Maybe going with MacGlusker was wrong because it would not stop anything. But going with MacGlusker was better than that helpless understanding passivity; better certainly than that back-in-the-mind gesture of impotence. MacGlusker in his untemporizing fashion was right. MacGlusker split open heads when his dignity was assailed, when his friendly world was attacked. A split head could make a point very clear—either way—a split head was a statement of values, a declaration of intent—either way.

When they were lying in bed Helen made him put his arms around her. He could feel her small quiver as his hands touched her back—as if they too were cold, a small warm gesture, the sort a person makes who is asleep and harmless. It was as if his hands could dip themselves in the warmth that came from her body.

"Don't let me go," she said.

"Helen," he said quietly, "when do you want to have a kid?"

"Right away," she said. "When we get back to the city I want the doctor to look me over."

"All right."

"Do you want it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I'm liable to doublecross you and have twins," she said.

"I'll never talk to you again," he said.

His voice made her cry.

He felt a silent elation in the darkness. He put his lips against his wife's throat. His arm became cramped, but he did not move it until she slept.

Then he got out of bed, and stood there looking at his wife. Helen lay bundled together like a tousled exhausted puppy. The undried tears were still under her eyes in tiny gleaming testimony to her fear for him. Asleep it was plain, for he could not assuage it with passionate words; he could not approach it, or touch it. It was like some mercurial fluid constantly escaping in that abandoned finality of sleep. He knew she was happy because he'd talked about the child, but her fear was greater, and he was proud of her for not saying anything.

He walked away from the bed to the window and lit a cigarette. He remained there, his shoulders hunched in prophetic bemusement. The world swung out from beneath the high window, darkly and echoless, as if poised and waiting the end of its duration, and out of its silence seemed to come the vast melancholy language of its failure. He was maturing, he thought, a hard solid maturity that Helen could not share. She would have a child and she would have him, and he was in love with her, but the swift apostatic maturity that swelled in him established a desire that was apart from Helen. He felt lonely; as if long cold fingers reached into the core of him; not a quenchable physical loneliness, but that of being alive uselessly. I have been, he thought, a perfect charge account. John Wanamaker's delight, the handsome young man in the Hickey-Freeman suit.

He went to the telephone and called MacGlusker.

"Hello," Mike said quietly, "What are you doing?"

"We're sitting," MacGlusker answered, "Lajos and myself, thinking."

"Listen, Mac," Mike told him, "I want to be in on it."

"All right," MacGlusker said, "I'm glad."

"I want to go with you."

"Come over tomorrow."

"What time?"

"Eleven."

"All right."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Mac."

"I'm glad you want to come, believe me."

"Thanks, Mac."

The receiver clicked gently and Mike walked back to the bed. He thought he would not be able to sleep but as soon as he lay down beside Helen he felt tired and fell asleep.

MacGlusker and Lajos were both watching the door when Mike walked in and came toward the table where they sat. MacGlusker leaned forward and said gruffly, "We were waiting for you."

"You told me not to come before eleven. I'm ten minutes early."

"Sit down, Mike," Lajos said. "MacGlusker can never be patient. Everything is settled. The only thing left to do now is wait until the right time. We know who they are and we know how we are going to get them, and all we need to start moving is a telephone call."

"How are we going to do this?" Mike asked seriously.

Lajos explained.

The girl had promised to call Lajos up tonight when they came into the bar. Then Lajos would drive to the bar in the Dodge, and get into a conversation with the men, tell them a few dirty jokes, stand the drinks, and then announce that he had an appointment at a house he knew and offer to take the three of them in the Dodge.

Thinking about it, Mike had to confess that it was airtight. This was Atlantic City, and they were three men on the loose, and with such men there always existed a universal lust. It made him smile. We could do so much with others' weaknesses, as they could with our own.

Now the professorial attitude of explanation was changed, Mike sensed, as Lajos fell silent. When he had talked there had been that quality of a lubricated piston stroking with silent rhythmic strength. It was the manner of a man who realizes failure as a thing greater than personal regret, who sees it beyond regret with a cold inclusive vision, as if he always regarded the totality of things rather than aspects. He was best at action. Without stating the necessity for success, Lajos had made it clear, as clear as MacGlusker's warm and impassioned outburst of partisanship—as if long ago Lajos had surrendered the eloquence of emotions for the eloquence of action watchfully and coolly devised.

Mike looked at MacGlusker. "I wish," he said, "that I really knew how to fight, how to use my fists. But tonight, I'm starting clean. I feel stripped, trimmed down. There is nothing left any more but the fight. It's very simple once you reach that conclusion, isn't it?"

"No," Lajos said quietly. He grinned at Mike. "It's complicated to fight because it is always against a darkness, always a fight beyond the fight you are in. Nothing like this is very simple. It is simple for MacGlusker, but not for you and me. We are cursed with ideology."

"Listen," MacGlusker said, "both of you, do me a favor. Keep still. All you have to do in a fight is remember not to let anybody get behind you." He glared at them with that shaggy rumpled quality of scorn. "I could go in there alone and get them, right now."

"I think," Lajos said, "you ought to stop acting like a hero in a cowboy picture."

"Go get a tumor and drop dead," MacGlusker answered.

Standing now with MacGlusker against the tall stiff wire fence, looking away into the silent darkness of the street and smoking cigarettes, because there was time to wait, Mike felt all the exciting conspiratorial anticipation of this moment.

MacGlusker looked at his watch. "He's still got nearly half an hour to come with them."

"Do you think he'll be able to bring them?"

"Yes. You can always depend on Lajos." MacGlusker seemed full of an ominous ease and poise now, as if all of him were posited by some transition within himself, and his anger and ability flowed in a kind of beautiful relationship toward an object.

Mike shifted his position against the fence and stared down the street. On their side the wire fence stretched the whole block, behind which, flat and bare, lay the tennis courts, and along the pavement, the even rows of trees intensified the spacious gloom. From beyond the street, deeply, steadily, came the smell and pound of the ocean.

Mike could feel MacGlusker's friendliness more than ever; it had a warming unsubtle largeness.

"How do you feel?" MacGlusker asked him.

"Listen," Mike said, "I'm all right. I feel fine. I'm not nervous. This thing," he explained, "I've thought it all out. I know why I'm here."

MacGlusker nodded his head. "Okay. But remember one thing. Don't let anybody get behind you if you can help it."

"You told me that before."

"I'm telling you again."

Mike smiled. "Listen, MacGlusker," he said. "I don't want you to worry about me. Please remember this is something I want; I picked it. Nobody asked me to come."

"All right," MacGlusker said. "Keep your ideology. Don't tangle me up now. I'm stating a simple fact. In a fight like this it is very easy to get hurt seriously."

"I'll take care of myself."

"I don't mean to offend you."

"You're not offending me."

"All right then, listen to me."

"I'll listen. What?"

"Make a fist?" MacGlusker asked.

Mike held up his hand, the fist clenched tightly, for MacGlusker's inspection. He looked at it carefully. "It's all wrong," he stated. "You hit somebody with your fist like that and you'll sprain it. You curve the wrist." He took Mike's hand. "Look," he continued, adjusting the position of Mike's hand until he was satisfied. "That way it's like a piston. And remember, you don't hit with the fist alone; the fist is like the end of the hammer, a surface for hitting; you hit with the shoulder and upper arm. Always remember, never swing wide, but short and straight. Keep your head down all the time; keep your mouth closed. Understand?"

"I understand," Mike said. He smiled at MacGlusker.

MacGlusker lit another cigarette, looked at his watch, then down the dark empty street, and smiled at Mike.

Mike's face had grown inscrutable. The wind was blowing swiftly and coolly past him as though hastening to some dark unseen imminence of despair. Here, in the stillness that was so deep he could hear MacGlusker's breathing, decision seemed to be in him like a hard core, and underlying that, an anger. Not out of despair or protest, because these things soon reached exhaustion; but an anger that functioned like an expensive mechanism; that rose in him over the outraged privacies of his life, his love for his wife and her desire for children; that evoked and fortified those cloistered instants against her, now intolerably sweet in this taut instant of recollection. An anger that in this beleaguered moment, with the sensation that he'd chosen it—that moving excitement of choice—shaped itself against the dark and frustrate future alive and savage of tongue in the wind and in the patiently implacable pounding of the ocean, in the new autumn, and in all the city where the clean healthy and sunburned people lay asleep. The anger burned with an incandescent light.

MacGlusker's voice suddenly pierced that hot encompassment of his thoughts. "There is the Dodge," he said. He stepped back against the wall, motioning to Mike.

The old sedan had just turned the corner; its headlights threw long bright jerky swaths of light onto the street. It continued slowly about ten yards, then stopped.

"Are they in there?" Mike asked. He moved from against the wall.

"Get against the wall," MacGlusker whispered.

They saw the men start to get out of the car; they were bulky in the darkness. Mike strained his eyes to see them; a hollow throbbing had started inside him. He suddenly wanted to see what they looked like; he could hear their voices, loud, rasping, assured, as Lajos joked with them.

"We step out when they get a few feet in front of us," MacGlusker muttered. Mike nodded.

He could hear the heavy pound of their feet; now he could make out Lajos' gestures and their own. Then suddenly MacGlusker moved out from against the fence, and Mike stepped beside him, conscious of the tightness in his stomach and legs, aware through his excitement and astonishment that they had come so close together very quickly, of the poised fluttering tautness of his arms and shoulders.

The men stopped abruptly, alertly, as if their bodies were aware of the trap before their minds could register it, but MacGlusker had already burst upon them like a thunder cloud and had one by the throat against the fence and was hammering him down, and Lajos too was moving forward, striking even as he moved. With a little shock of horror Mike saw the knife in Lajos' hand. And the noise of the fight rose like a sullen scuffling tide. Even before Mike could break through the knot of excitement that bound him, a crush of knuckles came against his face. A ring on the hand had split the skin. Then the numbness was driven out and there were only the shapes in front of him, and he began to strike too, remembering not to let anyone get behind him.

FREDERICK EBRIGHT

On Earth Good Will

The bar was festooned with red- and green-paper holiday garlands and a lot of papier-mâché bells and tinsel and artificial holly, all of which looked a little garish under the ice-blue and magenta glare of the neon lights. A big crepe paper legend at the rear of the room read: "Season's Greetings Army and Navy." The electric phonograph was blaring full-blast and the bar was crowded with sailors and marines and a few soldiers, and because it was Christmas Eve there was an especial volume of noise and holiday overtone to the place. It was that way all over Norfolk.

At the bar there sat a soldier drinking beer by himself. He followed the habit of all solitary drinkers, turning his beer goblet around and around, making wet circles on the dark mahogany of the bar, now and then taking a swallow of beer, picking at the moist label of the bottle and staring for long intervals at the display of wines racked before the mirror back of the bar. Behind him the crowd came and went and waitresses hurried with orders of beer and wine for the booths, but the soldier never turned around when the door opened or closed. He was obviously not expecting anyone. Now and then he would gravely signal to one of the bartenders to renew his beer, then he would pocket the change and continue drinking.

The neon lights were reflected in peacock tones on his glittering cap ornament and threw a frosty blue glow over his fresh young cheeks.

Beside him sat a sailor. The sailor was drinking draught beer. And he too, his pie-pan hat pushed back on his blonde hair, was obviously drinking alone. Each preserved a stony silence, almost hostile, staring dead ahead in elaborate unconcern and seeing nothing in particular.

It wasn't until the soldier dropped one of his dimes, the coin rolling under the sailor's bar stool and the sailor retrieving it, that they spoke.

"Damn near went in the spittoon," the sailor observed.

The soldier laughed. "Thanks, bud. That was a close one."

"Boy, you'd sure have hit the jackpot then!"

And at this witticism they both broke into gales of laughter, almost hysterical mirth. It was like the long-pent crack-up of a gigantic ice pack. Then, a little self-conscious, they gulped the rest of their beer in the aftermath.

"Have another beer," the sailor offered.

"No, let me get these. What the hell, you saved me a dime."

"Well, what the hell, it's Christmas; you should have a beer on me."

And between them they achieved the beers, a draught and a bottle.

"What ship are you from, bud?"

"The *Toledo*. Where're you from?"

"Fort York."

"Couldn't you get home for Christmas?" the sailor asked.

"Hell, no. I live out in Iowa."

"I guess it gets kinda lonely around the camp during the holidays, huh?"

"Well, no—or, well, yes, I guess it does, in a way."

"Me too. I like to get away from the damn ship on Christmas. I was lucky I didn't have the watch tonight."

The soldier pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

"Want a Camel, sailor?"

"Well, here, I got some Chesterfields."

"Well, what the hell; these are out. Let's have some more beer."

So they had some more beer, this time a waitress serving them, her full breasts under her thin smock bulging over the bar. The soldier whistled under his breath.

The waitress looked up at him sharply. "Do you want anything else?"

"I wouldn't mind a dance with you, sister."

"We're not allowed to dance in here."

"Well, how about afterwards?" the sailor asked. "After twelve?"

"I'll let you know later." She chewed her chewing gum vaguely and tucked a tendril of platinum hair neatly away. "I get kinda tired here by midnight."

Someone down the bar called her and she was gone.

"Boy, is she built!" the soldier said.

"I mean she is!" the sailor agreed.

And they drank some more and bought some more beers and exchanged some jokes and put some nickels in the nickelodeon, and the ice was thoroughly broken and they were having a great time and they sure were great pals.

"This is something, all right," the soldier said, "the Army and the Navy together!"

"Well, what the hell, it's Christmas."

And this was very funny and they laughed and laughed.

Then presently the waitress came up to them. "It's getting close to a quarter to twelve. If you boys want anything else to drink, you'd better get it now. We can't serve anything after a quarter of twelve."

"Well, ain't that something!"

"What about going out with us?" the sailor asked.

"I don't know—maybe if you'd want to get some wine, we could go out."

"You mean—?"

She looked quickly over her shoulder and then turned back.

"Um-hum," she agreed.

"What do you say, soldier?"

"Okay by me."

"Well, okay, then. What's your name, sister?"

"Gladys," the waitress said.

"Well, okay, Gladys, let's have a couple quarts of wine. Any kind. And a couple more beers."

She plopped two quarts of muscatel in paper bags and placed them on the bar. Then she brought two more beers. "That'll be thirty cents for the beer and two dollars for the wine."

"What! a buck a bottle for that stuff?" the sailor asked.

"Sure, it all costs a dollar."

The sailor and the soldier each laid a dollar on the counter and the waitress rang up the sale on the register.

"I guess she gets a cut out of the wine she sells," the sailor said.

"Well, what the hell, it's Christmas," the soldier said.

And they laughed again, and it was a quarter to twelve and the lights began blinking and the power was shut off the nickelodeon and the bartenders were calling, "All right! Come on, let's go, let's go! All outside!"

The soldier leaned over the bar. "Okay, see you outside, Gladys."

She nodded and gathered up glasses with one hand, mopping the bar with the other.

Outside a wet snowfall was coming down. And the Salvation Army tambourines were jingling and there was a sound of Christmas carols coming from somewhere and there were still a few people hurrying about, red-nosed with the cold.

"Seems funny, don't it?" the soldier asked.

The sailor shivered and hugged his jacket closer about him. "It sure as hell does," he said.

And in a few minutes Gladys had changed clothes and joined them. She had on a cheap little fur-trimmed coat. "Well, let's go, boys. We'd better get a taxi."

So they signalled a cab and Gladys gave the cabby an address, and they were off, drinking some of the wine as they rolled along the dark streets.

"This your place?" the sailor asked as they got out. It was a dingy, three-story frame house.

"Yeah, this is it. I got an apartment here with another girl, but she's away."

They entered and tiptoed softly to the second floor. It was a two-room apartment.

The soldier sat down and opened his bottle of wine, and Gladys and the sailor went into the other room. While he was waiting for them, the soldier looked about him. There was a battered radio and a photograph of a man who looked like an old-fashioned vaudeville actor. And some small snapshots of somebody's wedding, some faded artificial flowers and grimy lace curtains. In the hard glare of the overhead light the room was very shabby.

After Gladys and the sailor came out, they all had some more wine. And then the soldier went with her into the other room.

When he came out, the sailor was sleeping in an armchair, his head slumped forward on his arms. Gladys hurried across the room and shook him. "Wake up, sailor!" She shook him again. "Come on, you gotta get up!"

He looked up confusedly. "Wha'dya mean, get up?" He slumped again.

And once more Gladys shook him.

But this time the soldier observed a quick covert movement of her hand at the sailor's breast pocket.

"Here, sister! None of that stuff."

He was across the room and snatched the crumpled bill from her hands before she could hide it. He stuffed it back in the sailor's pocket.

"You gotta hell of a nerve," Gladys said. "You get him the hell out of here before I call somebody! What do you think it is, anyway?"

"Christmas," the sailor said foggily.

"Don't worry, sister, we'll get out. It was your idea of coming here, anyhow." The soldier went over and roused the sailor. "Come on, bud, get your coat and let's get going."

The sailor was still sleepy. "Okay by me."

He pushed his cap on and the soldier picked up his bottle of wine and they trudged out.

It was a long time before they could find a hotel; it seemed they walked miles. But at last they got a room and drank some more wine and slept.

In the cold bleak light of Christmas morning with an imminence of rain, there was something cadaverous-looking about the room: the faded wallpaper, the cracked green blinds, the scarred golden-oak furniture. The soldier looked at his wristwatch. It was twenty minutes to seven. He stared at a stain on the ceiling. The silence was oppressive and there was a note of depression in the strangeness of all this.

The sailor was still sleeping. His foot, sticking out from the lumpy comforter looked cold and white and bony. There was a rooster tattooed on his instep.

When the soldier rose to get a cigarette, the sailor woke. "What d'ya say?" he said thickly.

"Merry Christmas, I guess. Want a smoke?"

"Okay. Jeez, soldier, I'll be smoking all your cigarettes."

"It's okay," the soldier said. Shivering, he crawled back into bed. They smoked in silence for a while.

"Seems more like Sunday than Christmas, don't it?" the sailor mused.

"It sure don't seem like Christmas."

The sailor extinguished his cigarette on the linoleum floor.

"What the hell time is it, anyway?"

"Going on seven."

The soldier yawned. "Yeah, I can remember, this used to be a big morning for me. You know—a tree, and all. Say, do you know what I used to want more than anything else when I was a kid, and I never got it?"

"What was that?"

"Why, a chemistry set. Now that's a hell of a funny thing to want, isn't it? I mean, it seems funny now."

"Oh, I don't know," the sailor said. "I used to want a movie machine. I mean, a machine to show pictures. I used to see ads for them in the Sunday papers, and once I tried to sell enough subscriptions to get one, but I couldn't." He meditated.

"It's funny how you change, isn't it?" the soldier said.

"Yeah. Now I could buy the best movie camera made, but I don't bother."

Their voices were sad with resignation to age and change.

"That's the way it goes," the soldier said. He stubbed out his cigarette.

"Want to go out and get some chow?"

"No, I—I guess not."

With the hangover taste in his mouth, the thought of food made the soldier sick, and he sprinted into the bathroom and was sick. When he came out, his eyes were watering and he looked pale and shaky.

"By the way," the sailor said, "what the hell's your name, anyway, soldier?"

"Walker."

"Mine's Brandt."

"Glad to know you." They shook hands.

"Well, it looks like it's gonna rain. I might as well get started back to the ship." The sailor pulled on his socks and began lacing his shoes. "I'm not keen on going back so soon, but it don't look like there's a hell of a lot doing today in town."

"Yeah, that's the way it is when you're away from home. There's not much to do."

The sailor drank part of the rest of the wine and they finished dressing.

"Got everything?"

"Yep, I guess so."

They closed the room door and walked down the squeaky, musty-smelling staircase, leaving the key at the desk. Even the paper Christmas bells in the lobby looked ashen in the bilious light of morning.

A raw wind whipped them while they waited for the trolley and in the car they hunched in their coats and didn't say much during the long ride.

But before the sailor got out at the Naval Base, he said, "Well, look me up, soldier, if you ever get over here again."

"Okay, sailor, and the same to you if you get out to the Fort. Don't forget, Walker's my name."

"Okay. And remember, mine's Brandt. Well, Merry Christmas, soldier."

"Merry Christmas, sailor."

And with that, the sailor was gone. The soldier rode on alone to the end of the line where he would catch the ferry.

There was a heavy despondent feeling that he couldn't shake off. He wished the car would hurry so that he could soon be back at the barracks. There would still be some of the fellows there for Christmas.

And on the ferry it was worse. Suddenly, as the boat churned away from the docks, a wild access of loneliness swept over the soldier. A thin spit of rain was beginning to fall. He watched the gray shoreline of Norfolk slipping away and a trio of gulls disinterestedly planing in the cold light.

He wanted to cry more than he had ever wanted to. But he didn't know what he wanted to cry about. And, besides, soldiers never cry.

He drew his overcoat collar more closely about his ears and moved up to the bow of the boat where the wind was strong.

IRA WOLFERT

My Wife the Witch

Now, Harold thought, I do not want to go to bed, and knew that in the morning he would not want to get up. He was walking slowly and heavily down the long hall of the apartment house toward his door.

There were thirty-two average-length strides from the elevator to his door and fifty-five from the door to his bed. Since his wife's death, Harold had counted the distance often enough to remember it without effort. He thought of the sounds he would hear on the way from the door to bed—the thump of his feet against the rugs, the creak of the floor-boards under the rugs, door rattling, water splashing, drawer opening, light-switch clicking, bed springs straining. He had heard these, too, often enough to remember them without effort.

"It's really so neat it's almost beautiful," he thought, and it seemed to him, suddenly, that he was walking against a current. The feeling was incoherent and weird, rather as though he were walking against himself and through himself. He had had it before and had decided there was nothing he could do about it. So he did not puzzle over it now, but continued walking in the same slow, heavy way and at his door began to fumble ponderously for his keys. He was not a ponderous man. He was big and aggressive-looking, but he just wasn't in a hurry now. He just wanted to spend time doing something.

In the morning, he thought, I will be right here where I am now, without a step more than necessary. He would pick up his clothes in the morning and assemble himself on the way out. "Efficiency," he said to himself. For a moment, the single word remained in his head, stuck there like a look of contempt. Then he thought how only a man who lived alone could be so efficient and thought how this efficiency was the only use he had discovered in seven months for his loneliness and thought how, actually, the use was useless. When morning came he would be where he was now, exactly as he was now. Bathed and shaved, of course, linen fresh, hair combed, but no other difference. "Outside different," he told himself, searching in unfamiliar pockets for keys he was not disposed to find, "inside, the same."

"My friend," he said to himself—and thought, Where the hell did I put those keys—"you want to know the truth, my friend? You are very blooie. That tells the whole truth, very blooie." He found the keys in his back pocket where he usually kept them and thought of himself in the morning going back over the usual trail, from bed to front door, picking up his clothes as he went, houndlike, snuffling over the spoor of a lonely male and retrieving himself. His fingers trembled as he took up the proper key and the key felt as if it had been struck and was stinging.

Harold's legs gave under him. He put his hand against the wall and stood with head lowered. The apartment house was deep in sleep about him. Its silence was restless in his ears. He felt unstrung among his bones and as if his teeth were nibbling up and down along inside his legs. He thought and felt a muddle of many sorrows, but chiefly that, standing there, fumbling with a lock, shaking and kicking a door, he was cutting a dark, ruffianly figure. His tailor would be dismayed to hear it, he thought, and laughed aloud at a memory of the large, golfy man fluttering. His laugh startled him, it sounded so drunken; but it seemed to make his hand steadier. The key fitted easily, the lock turned easily and the door opened on blank, black space.

He squared himself to the silent darkness. "Harold's home," he announced in a small, strained voice. The sound of his voice made him titter. The light-switch was near, yet he did not reach for it. He tittered and waited and shut the door with a backward kick. He felt imprisoned in darkness. He was unable to turn his eyes from the silence. The door closed sighing. His brain seemed to inhale the sigh.

"Childe Harold's home," he shouted drunkenly. His voice rang against the ends of his nerves. He swayed, and a vacant smile appeared foolishly on his face. "The master's back," he said. The sway and the foolish smile were compelled, but they helped him yield to a feeling of drunkenness and relax in it. His sway became more pronounced. His blond, rugged head bobbed. His lips worked slyly and with persistence.

But he could not keep it up. There was no drunkenness to roll in him as he rolled. In a moment, the silent darkness was upon him again and he felt, abruptly, that if he were to call, his wife would come to him and he would no longer be alone in the dark. The name Amelia came into his mouth, but he could not utter it. He had not been able to say her name since her death. He had refused even to think her name, but now he thought it and could feel it couched warmly on his tongue.

"You hear me?" he said. His voice whined in his nose. It was as if he could not bear to let his voice pass his tongue. "I'm home, for Christ sake," he whined. "Where's the band to play." He felt tears close to his eyes and took off his hat and lifted it as high as he could and slammed it down furiously. The hat plopped against the floor. He waited for the echo of the muffled sound to end and then waited in the silence. "Who's here," he shouted. "Is there anybody here?" He strained to hear over the echo of his voice. When the echo ended, silence resumed, and he stared at the silence and grinned at it. "The master's here," he mumbled at it through his grin.

He bustled out of his coat. "Go on," he said and crouched, grinning, against the silence, "I'll knock your brains out," and threw the coat at the silence. He threw it so violently, he almost fell. "The master's drunk as a boiled goat," he said aloud in a low, sad tone and knew he couldn't believe it no matter how much he wanted to, and dropped his hands. Amelia's name filled his whole mouth. His breath had to struggle through it. "Yes," he cried aloud, "yes, yes, yes," and meant he was not afraid and thought, yes, he was afraid and thought, no, not afraid. It was just that he missed the life he had had before, that was all. It was just the pain of coming home to an empty house, that was all.

Rapidly and intently, he walked out of the foyer and down the hall and through the apartment to the living room where he began preparing a drink. "To jot the tittle," he said to himself as he poured the whiskey, "jittle the tot." As he added soda, it occurred to him that a conversation was going on in the foyer behind his back.

❦

Harold's reaction to the sound of the conversation was remarkable. He remained with his back to it and lifted his highball glass into the moonlight coming in out of the sky to make sure he had not added too much soda. Then he turned, assuming the polite smile of a host, and strolled leisurely towards the foyer.

There was no thought in Harold's mind, at least, none he was aware of. Just as he would not think of eavesdropping on his guests, so now he did not try to make out the words in the voiced sounds coming from the foyer. A light was on there. He did not remember having neglected to switch it on. He loitered forward casually, even pausing once to sip his drink. When he reached the foyer, he saw Amelia seated at the telephone, talking briskly, putting in a list at the market.

The smile on Harold's face neither vanished nor broadened. It remained agreeable and incurious, a host's smile, and he waited quietly for Amelia to be free. He seemed to have forgotten that Amelia had died. In fact, he did not think of anything particular or feel anything particularly, except, perhaps, gratitude. He was grateful because Amelia had returned looking as she had looked in life. He had forgotten her living face. The sight of her dead had shocked it out of his memory. For Amelia in death had not had a face he knew. It had been a child's face, pure of marriage, unmarked by life with a husband and even unknowing of it. Now the untouched and untouchable ghostly radiance was gone and her face lived again. It was dark again and a little wild, soft, too, and deeply friendly and it had all the quality of color, the unkempt beauty and whispering atmosphere of tree shade.

"I'm afraid Daniel is neglecting you," she said.

He noticed then Amelia had put down the telephone. He made no move toward her. His smile broadened and went deeper. It was the first smile in longer than a year, since the start of Amelia's final illness, that he could taste inside himself as well as on his mouth.

"He hasn't turned down your bed or aired your room," she continued. "There's an old smell of ashes in it. You should not smoke in bed, not the way you drink there, too."

"I can't sleep, so I've got to do something in bed." He did not hear his words. He was not sure whether he had said them or thought them. But Amelia, startled, rose abruptly from the telephone table and stood erect, her face fixed, and Harold remembered the woman he had brought into his house and into his bed a week before. He had had to do it. He had not been able to endure another furtive, drunkenly rented hotel room. She had been a woman he had known for many years. He had had to have dignity in an experience once more. "It was natural to feel," he thought. "How can I go against what's natural!" he cried within himself.

Amelia's face remained rigid. She seemed frightened and hurt. His mouth opened to tell her what he thought and how it had happened, but he couldn't say anything. His shame was too acute. Never again! he told himself. No, not ever! Simply never again!

"Your icebox is empty," said Amelia at last. Her tone was overfirm. "What kind of icebox is that in a house—one shriveled-up orange, four eggs! What got into Daniel, to put eggs in an icebox!"

He had given up eating breakfast. He never dined at home. He didn't know what Daniel kept in the icebox. "We figured," he said, "the eggs wouldn't hatch there."

She smiled. "That's silly," she said and began to laugh. "They'll hatch out penguins there," she laughed and he smiled eagerly into her laughter.

"You laugh so funnily," he said, "so, I don't know, as if cloudily." He stuck his finger into one ear and rubbed heartily and grinned. "It's as if I can't hear it in my ear, but I feel it there."

"Oh, then I'm fading."

"You're what?"

"I must go," she said hastily.

She began to bustle about. He stood watching her, but he did not see what she was doing. He saw only her face, preoccupied as a woman's preparing for departure. If she would stay, he thought, if only he could see her sitting across a table from him, if only he could walk into a bedroom and hear her sleeping there, if only he could smell her hair, if only he could know where she was and could think about where she was, if only he could light a cigarette for her or do something for her! He stormed with yearning and his hands moved forward longingly. He saw the highball glass he had forgotten he was holding. "Only one drink," he cried. "You must have one with me."

"That's another thing," she said in her cloudy voice. "You're drinking too much, Harry. You're getting to look blowzy and fat and old and, you know yourself, your mind is blowzy all the time."

He had been moving towards her. He halted, surprised. A feeling of doubt came to him. Could Amelia have changed that much? She had never spoken about drinking like that before. She had known, and must remember, how much of his social life had revolved around a convivial spot or two. Then, too, she herself had liked drinking. She had always insisted on drinking drink for drink with him. But maybe, he thought, maybe, she had drunk with him not because she had liked it, but only to keep him from drinking too much.

"Is that true?" he cried.

"Of course it's true. You would have noticed if you had looked, if you had wanted to notice. I never liked drinking. That's the truth. I can say it now. Drinking made me sick. I lost every drink, each one, one by one, right after drinking it, in the ladies' rooms of all those saloons you kept taking me to."

It did not occur to him that Amelia had answered his thoughts rather than his words. "It can't be." His voice was loud and violent. "How can that be, that I didn't get so much as a hint of it, not once in nine years, not so much as even a whisper in all those hundreds and thousands of times that that might be so."

"It would have made you unhappy to know, wouldn't it, and wouldn't have done any good, only harm, isn't that so?"

"But nine years! Never to give it away once in nine years! Such suffering for nine years! How could you be like that, do that to me!"

"To you?"

"Not trust me like that, make yourself think of me like that! Don't you see how you made yourself think of me like that, like a pig, swilling up my slops, not giving a damn for anything, just to be comfortable!"

"I didn't think our marriage could stand the strain."

"Is that what?"

"I didn't want you to be uncomfortable every time I was with you."

He stood suffering and searched for words in the jumble of his emotions. "I loved you," he said in a low tone.

"Yes, but the thing now is you're drinking too much, that's the thing, and not even trying to use your home as a home."

"I loved you," he said, "and now I'm alone here."

"Lots of people live alone."

"They didn't have to give up what I gave up to do it."

"Yes, many the same, and they don't dissolve themselves the way you do. You should take care of yourself. That's your responsibility. You must dine at home, have friends in, occupy yourself, build a life for yourself. That's why I've stocked up your icebox."

"Don't you think I've tried? It can't be, not for me. I'm just not built that way."

"Vitamin B-1," she said, "it'll work wonders," and began to bustle about again and seemed again preparing to leave.

"If you stay," he said.

She shook her head.

"But you must!" He stamped his foot. "We've had no time together at all, just arguing. I haven't even seen you."

"That wasn't my fault. I've been here waiting all evening. You were not. You were out drinking." She turned to the door and put her hand on the knob.

"Amelia!" The cry leaped from his mouth. She looked over her shoulder and smiled at him. "Tell me . . . tell me, Amelia," he floundered and said suddenly what he had not known he was going to say, "Will you come again?"

Her hand remained on the knob. She continued to smile at him over her shoulder. She said something he could not hear through the uproar in his own head.

"What did you say?" he cried. His eyes searched desperately for something with which to hold her and he saw his clothing lying crumpled where he had thrown it. He put the highball glass on the floor and gathered his coat and hat up swiftly. "I'll go with you," he said. "Wait!" He saw her open the door and he lunged after her. She was gone out into the apartment-house hall and down it, out of sight. "Wait for me!" he shouted and crashed headlong into the door.

For a moment he was stunned. He had not seen her close the door. The door had not been closed. She had opened it and left it open for him to follow. That was the way it had been. "Amelia," he cried, "what did you do?" and threw himself against the door. It was closed and solid, a real door.

Then, had he imagined her? But it had been so plain! He had seen the whole thing with his own eyes and had talked to her and had heard her with his own ears. He thought of running outside to look for her. But how could he make a scene like that, run through the streets looking wild like that! For what? To catch a dream that had gone away? To look for a dream he had had while awake?

He went out into the apartment-house hall. It was silent and empty. He walked to the elevator. The floor indicator was still and at the basement level. He could ring for the elevator and ask if anyone had just gone down. He could ask the switchboard operator downstairs if a woman wearing—what had she been wearing, coat, hat, no hat, couldn't remember a hat, couldn't remember anything she had been wearing. And, anyway, there was no use. If it had been Amelia, why should she use elevators or doors?

It couldn't have been Amelia, he told himself. There were no ghosts. There was no after-life. If there were, it would not take the form that cheap imaginations had given it, mumble jumblers and crystal-gazers and gypsy fakers and other riff-raff, phonies smarmy with hocus-pocus. No, it had been a thought that had occurred to him, that was all.

He put his coat and hat into a closet. He was shaking. His arm trembled when he lifted the coat to a hanger. He went into his bedroom. A window was open. The bed was turned down as it had not been in months. But Daniel could have done that. Yet the room still smelled smoky. Did that mean the window had only just now been opened? He went into Daniel's room. The man was asleep. He had slept through all that hollering and excitement! If the window had just been opened, it must have been by Amelia.

"Anyway," he thought, "that smoke smell wouldn't leave in a few hours.

It's in the bedclothes, in the carpets, in the cracks in the floor." He walked down the hall, past the foyer and into the kitchen. "It would take days of airing to get it out," he said and opened the icebox.

This would settle it. He hadn't looked into the icebox in weeks. No, that wasn't right. He had looked that morning and it had been empty. He had risen early and had wanted to mix a drink to rock himself back to sleep and had gone for ice and hadn't seen anything in the icebox. That was the way it had been.

He stooped and stared into the shelves. As Amelia had said, there was a shriveled orange on one shelf, far back, almost out of sight, and four eggs on another shelf. He picked up one of the eggs and held it and moved slowly away from the icebox with it. His fingers had become nerveless and, after a moment, the egg dropped and broke against the floor. He looked at it mutely. Then he crouched and put his finger into the yellow yolk. The yolk broke and wet his finger.

"Anyway," he thought, "a penguin didn't walk out."

He touched his wet finger to his lower lip to taste the egg. There was a picture in his mind of penguins waddling across the kitchen floor and, as he smiled furtively at it and tipped his lip with his finger and tasted the egg, he looked like an actor acting mad.

◆

The late Amelia Waldruppe Lammetter did call again on the man who had been her husband, but not until a spring evening several months later, when he had given up all hope that she would.

Harold saw her seated on the arm of an easy chair on the opposite side of the living-room. She seemed pensive. Her legs were straight out before her and her hands were clasped in her lap. She looked like a portrait that had been painted of her once in Budapest. The artist had liked his work so much he had refused to part with it, so the Lammetters had no copy. Nevertheless, Harold remembered it in detail, and, to judge by her posture, so did Amelia.

Once more, their conversation began in the middle, without any introduction or even preliminary emotions that Harold could remember, and Amelia told him he ought to marry a second time. Although these would seem to be unusual words to hear from the woman who had been his wife, Harold was no more stirred than he might have been by his own musings. Amelia said marriage seemed to be the only way for him. That was the kind of man he was. He had no choice. Without marriage, his life was disorganized and painful and was on the way to becoming sinister.

"You know," he said, "I've been thinking the same thing. But it's getting so it's not painful any more."

"Dangerous," she said, "evil."

"Oh no, I'm getting used to it now."

"You know what you're doing with your mind, don't you, Harry?" She began to tap the palm of her hand with one finger, like a reprimanding teacher. "You know what you're doing? You're fingering something sinister with your mind, Harry. You mustn't. You mustn't toy with this dangerous, evil thing that's come into your mind. Let it go away, let it slide away, Harry, and forget it, wash it away and think and do other things, get married."

She spoke softly. Her words ran along his mind like wind, and he waited for them to halt and waited for the feel of them to end, and then thought, hungeringly, of how they had felt.

"I'm not doing anything against myself I can help," he said at last. He thought, perhaps she had meant the increased loneliness that had come to him since her first visit.

"You're not doing what you should."

"Well, it's worked out that way, but I do what I can, the most and best I can."

"You see? You're in a marasmus."

"How dramatic you are."

"Dramatic?" Her voice resounded. "Your life is at stake."

"So extreme," he said, "so exaggerated. What's marasmus? What kind of a mysterious word is that? There's nothing mysterious in my life. You exaggerate so much. What am I doing? I just go along living like everybody else, from day to day."

His anger seemed unreasonable even to him for a moment. Then he recalled how he had prepared for her visit, how thoughtfully and how energetically. Amelia, of course, he had decided, was no longer a normal woman. He could not expect that she would be touched by normal preparations—flowers, dinner and supper reservations, with a variety of companions suitably chosen to take up the slack of his own presence and add spice to it. Preparations to receive such a woman as Amelia was now would have to be on a different level. So Harold had exercised to slim himself, a disagreeable and low-grade discipline to him, involving flexings, bounds, heaves, grunts and perspiration, and made endurable only by the thought that each lover offers his love what he can. He had refused to drink, had not allowed himself to enter any woman's life or to invite any woman to enter his life and had devoted all the time he could spare—more than he could spare, in fact—from his law practice to remaining at home so that she might not find him out when she arrived. He had read the Encyclopaedia from "A" to "Brai," waiting for her, and now all these taxing efforts must be regarded as wasted. Amelia again was squandering their time together in reproaches.

"Living like anybody else?" she cried. "Coddling this poisonous adventure in your mind! Is that like everybody else? Snuggling up with it in your mind, taking it in your fingers and stroking it, milking it with these strokings to milk out the poison of it drop by drop and let it drip into your mind! Who lives like that except you!"

Her words had the form of outrage, but her voice seemed fond to him and sensual. She spoke of evil voluptuously. Her voice licked his mind, and his mind stirred sensually to evil. He closed his eyes.

"Where is your sense of life?" she cried, suddenly harsh. His eyes were jarred open. "What are you doing to your business?"

Now, he thought, we're up to that. He had known she would speak of it. She was too deeply involved in it not to. It was Amelia who had turned him into a successful lawyer with her money, her shares in various corporations, her friends and, more than that, with her drive and the busy social life she had made for them both.

"You are becoming a scandal among those who know you," she said. "Among those who know you, who trusts you with anything important nowadays?"

"The war . . . the situation . . . it's dumped my clients right out the door. That's the truth. They sit on their money in the cellar and don't move, waiting for Hitler to tear up their money."

"The war! That's a dope's excuse. Don't say the war! Lawyers get fat on ruin."

"No, that's the truth, what I said."

"You want to tell me the worms starve on the pile, the worms, the bugs, the leeches, slugs and lice, the midges and maggots? They starve?"

"It's the truth. The war . . ."

"No, this is the truth, that you have no interest in your career any more."

Yes, that was the truth. He had to agree. He had not realized it before, but it was true. He had once been interested in success, but never in lawyering. Now, since Amelia was not there to sustain the attraction, he was no longer interested even in success.

"You have no interest in anything," Amelia went on. "You live here in a tomb all night and go to your office and live inside yourself in a tomb all day. You do not entertain yourself. You do not learn anything new or try to understand anything new. You do not seek anything. You give yourself to nothing. You take nothing."

"All right, what of it?" he said angrily.

"What of it? You know what that is? That's being dead. You have no friends any more, no acquaintances, not even an enemy."

"I'm my enemy."

"You are. Your only one."

No, he thought unexpectedly, not my only enemy. I have another one. He gazed at Amelia steadily, with the look of mingled anger and speculation a lawyer wears when he is about to expose a hostile witness. He felt the look upon his face and disowned it uneasily. What he suspected couldn't be true, he told himself. She wasn't putting a dangerous idea into his head. It must be his own idea. How could his Amelia, the sweetest-minded of women, be engaged in a plot against him?

❧

For Amelia's sake, Harold had set about to build a new life for himself. He had animated his apartment with guests. It hadn't worked. He hadn't been able to concentrate on it or interest himself in any of them. There had been no hostess. The men had irritated him. The women had seemed dull. All women had become dull to him and even objectionable—vapid creatures, really, with empty heads and incompetent, florid bodies, floridly ornamented, even to the flesh. He had come to believe there was nothing intrinsically attractive about women and had concluded that their attractions were immaterial and certainly irrelevant to him since they could exist only in the mind of a willing man.

"You see what happened?" he told Amelia. "I thought it would be better to receive you alone. That's what happened. I thought you did not come because of all those people and their chat-chat-chat, blah-yammer-yammer, that revolting glee people go in for when they're together, so I cleared them out for you."

"It was a mistake."

He was silent. He waited intensely for her next words, afraid she would advance her plot a step further and so, perhaps, begin to disclose it.

"You would not have made such a mistake if not for the marasmus you're in," she said.

"Now there you go, now I must insist, now that's not so!" He was so angry he could feel no other emotion. "Please, for God sakes, don't you go talking it into me that I'm sick. There are enough old ladies in the world without me, too. It's not so. Not so at all. Why, damn it, Amelia, how can you keep on so stubborn like this, with this stupid theory of yours, when there's nothing to support it. Everything just happened, that's all. It was a situation that developed logically, one thing after another and no sickness to it at all."

"Firing Daniel, too? Was that logic?"

"Yes, logic, straight logic." Why not? If Amelia was determined to keep her present self private from friends who had been her friends, too, then she wouldn't want Daniel around either. So, rather than answer the questions that would arise on the man's face if he had been asked to sleep out, Harold had fired him. "Does that make me sick," he cried, "because I'd rather cook for myself to occupy myself, and a daily cleaner is all I need?"

He glared at her. Her face was tranquil. He felt she had not believed him and he began to disbelieve himself. His anger gave way to uneasiness. "The adjustment," he said uneasily, "was a little hard in the beginning, I admit. I smoked too much and so on and so forth." He had walked too much from room to room and had sat too much, longing too much for her to come. And he had eaten alertly, listening for her. He had shaved alertly, listening, cocking his head. He had even changed from a shower to a tub bath so that he might not lose the sound of her coming in the sound of running water. Each night sound had cracked in his heart. The silence had sat icily in his ears and had expanded into his mind. "I knew the danger, too; that it was a dangerous thing to fool around with, this waiting and loneliness." He failed to notice he was not addressing Amelia, but was speaking to his lap. "You're quite a femme fatale, my dear," he said. He smiled quickly. The smile vanished quickly. It's true, he thought, she's come to scheme out my death He shuddered away from the thought and struggled to remember what he had meant to say. "I am not an intellectual, a philosopher or anything like that," he said in a low, clotted tone, "but I know, oh yes, I know, I know how dangerous to the mind that kind of business is. So I took steps."

"The seers?" Amelia mocked at him softly. "The clairvoyants and spiritualists?" Her voice ran on, but he was afraid to look at her. He remained staring at his lap. "The specialists in ectoplasm, the summoning-of-voices, crystal-gazing, palm-reading, spirit-writing, table-rapping, spells and trances, with the smell of lard in the black velvet hangings and the smell of vegetables in their hair? Those were the steps you took to adjust yourself?"

"Yes," he said, still into his lap. How obscene she had made it sound, how sick. How grotesque she had made his lie sound to him! Yet it was only a small lie and not altogether a lie. It was true he had not solicited the help of these highly recommended shams to adjust himself to loneliness, but to stimulate a visit from Amelia. However, Amelia had not responded, and his experiences with the fakers *had* tranquillized him. That was so. Their mumbo-jumbo had not been attractive. They had all been shopkeepers who had attempted to discover, with their coarse, low-grade minds, what he wanted and sell it to him. Their efforts had succeeded in confirming him in his distaste for concern with an after-life. They had restored his conviction that concern with an after-life was useful only to permit five-cent phonies to flim-flam or sick minds to suppurate. And, after seeing the crystal ball for what it was, a draining basin of the mind, he had been able to go on the way back to normalcy.

Well, perhaps not exactly normalcy. He did not drink any more. He could not. After what Amelia had revealed, drinking must remain unendurable. Even if it were not Amelia who had visited him—as he had begun, at that time, to suspect—but merely a notion, still he felt it was true that his drinking had been a cruelty he had practised on her in her lifetime. Nor could he involve himself with any woman. The thought of Amelia was too harrowing and would grate the bloom off any such adventure he might undertake. He hadn't the energy or desire to make a new circle of acquaintances for himself and, besides, the lonely life suited him. It gave him more time for himself and less reason to worry. He did not have to turn on the radio now or read a newspaper or listen to people who had. He did not have to keep up with the times.

Harold lifted his head abruptly and looked at Amelia. His face was haggard. He suspected that Amelia could read his thoughts. What had he been thinking? he asked himself, revolted. That his own Amelia had turned against him? That this woman whose mind had been like a flower in her head was now so unnatural, inhuman, deathly corrupt as to be able to plot to murder him? As to be able to fondle his emotions with a smile while she advanced her plot? Then he must be sick. He could not possibly have thought this of Amelia for an instant if he were in his right senses.

Amelia was smiling at him gently. Her eyes were eager. As the thoughts flowed roaring through Harold's mind, the gentleness of Amelia's smile hardened almost imperceptibly and her lips began delicately to twitch with amusement.

❦

"Marriage is a better way to adjust yourself," Amelia said.

"Better than what?" Harold's thoughts had carried him so far away he had forgotten what they had been talking about.

"Better than the smell of beef stew in gypsy hair."

He looked at her astonished. Women, he thought, are really extraordinary. He wagged his head at her fondly. "Women never change," he said, smiling. "Whatever happens to them they can always stir up an interest in matchmaking."

"I do not do it for the sake of entertainment. You're more gone than I thought."

"Gone where?"

"In your adventure, this poisonous adventure of yours."

He looked away uncomfortably.

"You're not a monk, Harry, goodness knows," Amelia said. "You can't live like a monk. Or worse! Live like a monk without a god."

"I have a goddess," he mumbled, embarrassed, and forced himself to look at Amelia and looked at her squarely. His eyes became bright. They began to teem with yearning. His whole face reddened and quavered and seemed to steam with yearning. He held Amelia's gaze. He drew her gaze out of her and their separate gazes seemed to swim into each other and cling and seemed to be bodies laid upon each other and mingling.

"That's over," Amelia said slowly.

"Don't!" he cried. "Don't! Not to tell me . . . I mean, what I know already."

"You don't know," Amelia said in the same slow voice. "I know you don't because you don't believe it, but believe me, Harry, it's done with and gone away forever. Not only finished, but done with." She pushed the palms of her hands against the air. "Not only gone away, but over forever. Nothing can ever be of that ever again. Not anything at all . . . except sickness . . . a poison . . . this evil adventure of yours . . . something to craze you, crazy-wild sickness, but that's all. That's how it is, Harry. As long as there is a space in the universe, that's the way it is. For, if there is a space, then there is a place where nothing can exist and, as long as nothing can exist anywhere, then nothing will exist for us together."

Not even in his anguish did he move toward her. He lowered his head as she spoke and let her words shake down on the flesh of his brain. The words shook down like rain. They did not seem to be formed by a throat or even out of air. They had no substance or timbre and seemed almost like thoughts, yet they had the physical force to pelt and prickle. He struggled in silence for a moment with a feeling of dense pain. Then he said quietly, "I know."

He looked up frightened. He thought perhaps Amelia had gone, but she was still there, graven with sorrow, looking fleshless now and like sculpture. Now, he thought, she would go away. She had said what she had come to say and now would leave. To hold her, he cried excitedly. "It's a funny thing that you should bring this up, about marriage I mean, just tonight."

"I have had it in mind a long time."

"But I mean that you should mention it just tonight, bring it up like that when, on the way home, I mean from the office this evening, coming home through the park on the way home, I was driving and a peculiar thing happened." He spoke in a rush. "Really unusual," he said and got up and began to pace back and forth. "A sensational thing and stupid, too, damned annoying, and embarrassing, too, about this girl, the one, I mean, who was there."

"You know that feeling I used to get," he rushed on, "about luck, about how I would be lucky that day? I had it this morning for the first time in a long time and I waited all day for the luck to show up and nothing did. I had the feeling all day that this was a lucky day, but the luck never broke for me. And on the way home, I really felt kicked in about it. Because, you know, that never happened before, that I should have the feeling really solid for a whole day and not get a break some way."

The implication that he believed no luck could come to him at home penetrated his excitement and made him halt confusedly. Amelia had always been quick to pick up such things and throw them back—generally, he remembered, wrapped around a brick. "I mean business luck," he said. "That's what I'd expected the luck to be, a fat new litigation, I mean, walking in, something like that, because, you know, things have not been going right in the office for me. I don't know what it is, but I can't handle clients any more, the oldest clients that I had licking my fingers, routine cases, contracts. Whatever comes up, I get sort of hot flushes in my mind and can't do the simplest thing except bonehead mistakes."

"Marasmus," Amelia said.

He looked at her, startled, and frowned. No, he decided, he wouldn't think what he thought. He couldn't. Not about Amelia. "I had this feeling of disappointment," he said uncertainly.

"No doubt, sulking," said Amelia. "I can see you," she laughed and pouted, "with your lips hung out like this." She pouted so extravagantly her words sounded sucked out of shape.

"And what should I get a flash of then," he smiled, "going around the

Seventy-second Street bend there, while I was, I mean, Norma van Neppes. You remember her, on that duck shoot we had on the eastern shore, somewhere down there, Vincent's wife?"

"The dark pretty girl who liked killing?"

"I don't know what she liked, but, anyway, when I got this flash of her in the corner of my eye, I thought . . . naturally . . . well, I thought, by God, here was the luck!" He slammed his fist against his open hand. Once more, his face was alight with delight. Then he became confused again. "Because, you see, you know," he explained, "I need friends, new friends, or to get back in with the old ones, and with her I could. That's the way I could climb back in the door, get back into the world. But I didn't even know where she was staying in town and here I was, batting on past her in traffic. I stopped right there, I mean the car. Jammed on the brakes. Jumped out into the road. You should have heard the excitement."

"I can imagine."

Harold began to laugh. "Everybody was going up in the air all around me like confetti," he said, "so I went up in the air, too. There was squealing. Cars twisting out of my way. Crashing. Two or three cars crashing. Glass breaking and a policeman blowing his whistle at me because, you know, I was unribboning across the road, running to get out of the way."

"A hot flush on the brain?"

"Something like that, with all the excitement at my back and me running like that. I jumped the fence, a small, sort of knee-high fence there, wire fence, I think, and landed almost in her lap. Bowled her over. Well, not me alone. She was walking a dog on a leash, some kind of a kiyoodle and it kiyoodled her all right, yipped back the wrong way and twisted the leash around her legs, ankles or something, whatever ladies have down there around their shoes, and dumped her flat, you know, flat down with a bump, not on her face, either."

"On her this-a?" Amelia patted herself behind gaily. "On what they call, among the forbidden fruits, the melon?"

"Well, you know what comes next, I guess." Harold had felt the edge in Amelia's voice. "As soon as I picked her up I saw she wasn't Norma. But she wouldn't let me go. I suppose she thought I was a bandit running from a hold-up or something and she held on to me, very heroically, I must say. She hit me on the head with her pocketbook. She seemed to be carrying a kitchen sink in there. And kicked me in the shins and her little mutt took my leg in his mouth and broke his teeth on it. Every time I tried to explain to her that she wasn't Norma, she hit me with something else. By that time there was a crowd around, all heroes after the bandit, and you couldn't have dug me out of there with a shovel. There were lawsuits growing everywhere I looked. I kept saying, 'But I thought you were a friend of mine,' and that got me in worse because nobody liked the idea of having all this trouble over a pick-up, somebody else's pick-up. And, oh yes, this girl said that I was a sheik on wheels, sidewalk arab, and that she would be a witness against me in all the lawsuits."

"Well," said Amelia, "there was your luck. Now go on with it."

Harold looked at her to see if she were joking.

"I mean it," continued Amelia. "She was pretty, wasn't she, and now she must feel sorry for you, the way she acted?"

He shook his head stubbornly.

"But you must go on with it," Amelia cried. "You must go to see her."

"No," he said. "You're the luck, your coming here tonight."

"All you have to do is call on her and make your apologies and find out if you want to go on with the luck."

"I don't want to! Why do you insist on doing this to me when I don't want it."

"You know why I insist? Because you do want it. You wouldn't have jumped out of the car if you hadn't wanted it so much."

"I thought it was Norma."

"But why should you run after Norma like that? I don't remember that you cared for her so much as all that, to jump through traffic, over a fence, to make such a scene to get to her side. You're desperate, Harry, don't you see? You're desperate, without knowing it, for something to take you out of this marasmus you're in, and there's something in you that doesn't let you know you're desperate."

"No! I won't! I won't, that's all."

"Why not?" she cried. "Find out why not, Harry, when it's what you want!"

"What's there to find out? You want me to calf around in the moonlight with this stranger, pawing her, mooning over her, mooing in her ear, and I say it would make me sick at my stomach to have to do that, go through that whole stricken business again at my age." He thought of how he had got through all the sappy torment of love-making with Amelia and had got it settled with a marriage and then had gone on to the real business of life, the real business of the personal life, which is to grow. And now Amelia expected him to go back over the whole thing all over again, persuade this girl to love him, persuade himself to love her. "For what?" he said loudly. "What's the purpose? Six months from now, a year from now, I'll get up to the point with this girl where you and I started together. Light housekeeping. That's the best I'll be."

"You won't have to make yourself love her. If you love her, you'll love her."

"I'm talking about marriage. What chance has such a marriage got? It's sick from the start, lopsided from the start. How can I wipe out what I've become and stand still, not grow, live dead, while she catches up to where I am, to where you got me in my life?"

"I think it could be interesting in other ways and useful."

"I don't want to be interested or anything useful," he said sullenly.

"That's the trouble with you." She wrung her hands. "Don't you see that's the trouble, Harry, one of the poisons of your adventure?"

"Besides," he cried, "how do I know if I can grow any more?"

"You're not as old as all that."

"Yes, old, really old, old in the head. I stopped growing a year ago when you . . . when it happened, your sickness came. I haven't grown since and haven't wanted to grow. That's how old I am and tried I am, of everything, of living."

"Your body still has needs."

He lowered his head, embarrassed. "They're not interesting," he said petulantly, "not important."

"They *are* important." Amelia's voice was sharp. "Here, lift your head. Look at me. They're *important*. They're your self-preservation. You deny those needs only because you want to poison yourself some more."

He raised his head and slowly turned his face towards her. "All right," he said, "I agree. I had needs and found out I needed you. That's whom I needed, not some stranger running around in the streets with a dog, not somebody I can . . . I could . . . might . . . these hotel-room . . . these degrading vulgarities, animal cathartics. I don't need that. I'm not an animal, I need you."

"You don't know anything about her and you're so positive! Why is that? Why don't you give her a chance?"

"I'm positive because I know this. I know that marriage isn't an accident, something that happens. It didn't happen to us two. We did it. We each grew as the other needed us to grow and wanted us to grow. That wasn't a miracle, an accident, made in heaven, as they say, two people made for each other. Made for each other? No! We made ourselves over for each other. We weren't made! We made! Isn't that right? And now you want me to wiggle my hands, hocus-pocus, and unmake myself, let this stranger kiss away what I am, kiss off my whole personality and begin all over again with her. How can I do it? It's impossible. I can't."

"If you begin it, she won't be a stranger to you long."

"Yes! A stranger! That's what!" He flung his hand through the air. "Some girl stuck away somewhere in the world! I don't want her."

"You have to want someone." Her voice was light with cunning. "That's life and you're still alive." Her face was piqued with cunning.

"I don't want to be."

She frowned to hide a smile of triumph. "But you are," she said with deliberation, "and since you are, you have to grow towards someone and with someone. You can't live like a corpse."

"The pain!" he cried. His voice quivered and his arms lifted towards Amelia. "The pain! Think of the pain of growing! Maybe it's exciting when you're young, but I'm not young any more. It isn't new to me any more. It's an old story. I know it. I know every inch of the pain, the pain of the excitement, the pain of growing, the exasperations and exhaustions and flaring-up and being ashamed, the pain driving in, sticking in your head like fingernails until you're crazy for a minute there and fight with what you love, what you need and hate what you love and need. Do I want all that all over again, with someone else, this intimate thing?"

"You have to."

"No! Don't say it! Not, not, don't, not! I'm bleeding, Amelia. You left me bleeding. We were cut apart and I'm bleeding. Should I run to this stranger, bleeding, and hold up my amputations, my amputated mind, my amputated heart, and stick out my nerves at her, should I, my bleeding stumps of nerves and cry to her to put her hands on them and stop the bleeding and put her lips against them and heal them? Is that what you want, that I should do that? And if, because of some disease in her, a lack, a want, because of something unwhole, repulsive in her . . ."

"What are you saying?"

"Yes! Repulsive! That's what I'm saying. Repulsive! Diseased! What else could attract her to a sick, amputated man like me?"

"Everybody has these lacks. That's what makes love. You love the one who supplies what you lack. You just said it yourself."

"But sick like that! To love sickness like that! No! No! She'd revolt me if she did. I can't do it. It would be a farce. It's too late. I'm too tired. I'm too old. I can't do it. I don't want to do it. There are not many people who try to do it even once in their lives. How can you ask me to try twice?" He advanced on her in fury and she retreated, unafraid, thoughtful, leading him deeper into his fury. "I'm made," he shouted. "I'm finished up with, stopped growing, done up, polished off, wrapped up, sealed with a sticker on, an old man. And you know what's left for me? You know all that's left? To wait to die."

With each shout, he had taken a step forward. With each forward step, she had retreated. Now she ducked around him and stood between him and the window. There was a shadow on her exultant face and it looked like grief. "Is that the way you loved me?" she asked.

He was breathing heavily. He didn't trust himself to answer. He took a deep breath to calm himself and let it go noisily and took another deep, rasping breath. "Yes," he said harshly.

For a moment Amelia hestated and, for a moment Harold thought he knew what she was going to say, that he should come with her, that she would take him with her. She glittered like a witch, cold and calculating, before his eyes. Was he ready? Is that what he wanted? Is this what he hoped for? He shuddered and waited for her to speak.

"You will enjoy it, Harry," Amelia said. She began making preparations to leave. She seemed to gather herself and her things, various things that he did not see. "You always enjoyed it," she said, "the beginning of it, when it's still a game. I found that out. Poor Lily? She found it out and her husband almost found it out, too, didn't he? And Jeaney, they all found it out, that you liked the game, and three or four others, too, weren't there, found it out, didn't they, that you enjoyed the game?"

The feeling of surprise and relief that had come to him at her first words gave way to shame. "What do you mean?" he said in a voice pitched so high it sounded strangled.

"Oh, don't be silly." Amelia waved his emotion down. "It's past."

"I mean, did you know it then, too, I mean when we were together?"

"Of course I knew it. How could you keep those little grubbings around in other women's clothes from your wife? I knew all the time and, you'll see, you'll get frisky again."

"I never imagined that you knew. It was the last thing I would have wanted, to bring hurt to you. I would have died rather than embarrass you."

"Oh, forget it. Just drop this stupid, dangerous adventure of yours and get frisky again. It's what you need now. Calf around in the moonlight. Let your thoughts frisk over your flesh. That's what you should do."

"I'm too old for that now."

"You're old?" She tapped a finger towards him playfully. "At thirty-eight? Why you look in your young thirties. You might even be, on a moonlight night, with not too much moon, you might even be taken as in your late twenties by someone with love in her eyes."

"You think so?" said Harold. He thought of Lily who had come to him in moonlight when he had not been much past his twenties and of Betty who had also happened in moonlight. He pulled in his abdomen and expanded his chest and raised his head slowly to Amelia. "Do you really think so?" he asked before noticing she had gone.

❦

Her name was Natalie. Since she was willing to act as a witness to the collisions, the policeman had taken it down. Harold manipulated it out of him with the aid of a cane, a derby hat, mocha gloves, a lapel flower, a $5-bill and an atmosphere of faintly dominating but generally agreeable importance. When Harold called on Natalie, he left his cane, derby hat and mocha gloves at home. He felt they made him look too mature.

Natalie shared a two-room apartment near the park with the dog and a sister and brother-in-law. She slept, apparently, in the living-room with the dog, and did some sort of secretarial work in the office of some sort of business. The details were not clear. She was out when Harold arrived, and her sister received him.

The sister seemed quite impressed. Natalie had told her about Harold, but obviously had led her to expect something less than a wealthy, decorous, imposing and rather young man. Soon she was confiding that Natalie was on vacation, and things advanced so rapidly between them that Harold could permit himself an expression of surprise. The vacation season had not yet begun. It was unfortunate, the sister agreed, but Natalie had had no choice. She launched into an involved story about the requirements of Natalie's employer during the normal vacationing seasons.

At last Harold declared there were legal necessities as a result of the collisions that required immediate consideration. "Perhaps your sister's husband could act for her?" he suggested and learned Natalie was not married. Then, might he write her at her vacationing place? Harold came away with Natalie's address.

Amelia advised Harold against writing. A letter, she said, might easily be the end of it. Natalie might not answer and that could become the end of it. No, he must wait for her to return and then call on her in person. So Harold waited. He waited a day and a night before deciding he might as well begin his own vacation.

The beach hotel in North Carolina where Natalie was staying pleased Harold. It was somewhat more middle-class than he was used to, but it was quiet. Deliberately, he arrived late at night, because he preferred

Natalie to see him for the first time in the morning when he could be wearing the knockabout clothes in which he looked youthful. But by morning, as he went in to breakfast, his zest for the encounter had left him. He saw the back of Natalie's head as he entered the hotel dining-room and saw that she was breakfasting alone with a newspaper for company. He seated himself outside the direct line of her vision and drank his coffee and wondered angrily when, if ever, he would get into the mood for conquest. He never did get into the mood for conquest. Instead he suddenly saw Natalie looking at him, her whole face flung up like a startled animal's, an expression of surprise standing on it as if on tiptoe, and he was conquered. She was exactly as he had remembered her during their first meeting—perhaps a little more bosomy, but dark as Amelia, white-faced like Amelia, animated as Amelia was in the same self-possessed, almost grave, thrilling way.

Harold nodded and Natalie looked away. She looked at the waitress indignantly, as though she believed Harold's presence was a plot against her in which the waitress had conspired. After a moment or two, Harold approached her nervously.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I feel I must explain myself."

"Do you? There's no need." She did not seem flustered, only curt.

"I'm not pursuing you, you know. That is, not exactly, not . . . no matter how much I may want to." He saw her look around impatiently, as if for help. "I thought," he resumed hastily, "that is, my idea was, if you were going to sue me, you would need a lawyer." He extended his card. "I'm a lawyer," he announced.

In her surprise, she took his card and glanced at it and then dropped it to the table. "I don't care for your attempts at humor," she said. "You have no right to impose yourself on me."

"But I'm a pretty good lawyer. I'm quick to make motions, as you have reason to remember," he smiled awkwardly, aware of the glibness and transparent vulgarity of the play he was performing for her. "I can argue objections convincingly, even against a closed mind." He sat down opposite her with comical abruptness.

He sat in an attitude of easy, confident languor, but his trembling hands betrayed him. He leaned forward. "I am not used to this," he said. His voice was quiet, but it shook a little. "I mean, to forcing myself on anyone in this way. I never have done it. I've been tempted, of course. Haven't you been tempted?"

"Tempted?"

"Tempted. It's happened several times to me. I had imagined it happened to everybody, that you are walking along deep in your troubles and see someone, a face, a bare flash of a face, and know surely that if you spoke, you would find a friend there, a great, wonderful thing, something really wonderful that would make you happy. Hasn't that happened to you? I had imagined, sort of hoped, that it had happened to everybody, that they would have this regret in their life that they did not speak." He looked at her furtively. He could tell nothing by her face and he went on quickly, "I never have been able to speak before, when I saw a face like that in the crowd going past me. I couldn't imagine doing it and can't imagine what got into me to do it now, to break into your privacy like this, when I respect privacy so much, come all the way down from New York to do it, too."

"I don't know why you're saying this to me—even though I do like it."

"I can't understand why either." He did not look at her. He thought of the dark fantasy in his life, the heat haze that stood in his eyes when he was alone in silence. "I had to," he said slowly. "I'm not really that kind of a man who goes around doing that, imagining he can do it with anybody, that nobody would mind when he did it. That kind of arrogance I don't have. But this time I had to." A shimmer, as of Amelia, clouded his mind and he looked at Natalie quickly in a frightened way, forgetting what he had said to her and wondering if he had said too much, if he had let slip a hint of the phantasm in his life.

Natalie's face was soft with interest. Her eyes sparkled with daring. "Well, go on," she said roguishly, leaning forward and folding her hands against the side of her chin, "surely you don't have to stop there."

◆

After breakfast, they walked the beach and found horses they could rent and galloped them along the edge of the sea. Natalie rode well. She was a Joplin, Mo., girl, she explained, and had grown up with mules. They lunched together and then they went driving through the marsh and pine-wooded lands back of the sea. Natalie insisted that a married couple she had become friendly with at the hotel go along, so Harold brought the party back in time to fish the surf at twilight. In the evening, they found a place near town in which to dance. The married couple was again in attendance. Nevertheless, the affair progressed. When Harold left Natalie at the door to her room, he had a feeling of physical pain, almost as if he were tearing her out of him. In the morning, he rushed to greet her and re-establish her at his side. His emotion in rushing toward her was not like joy, but more harried and more extreme; it had in it a sense of breaking out of the imprisonment of loneliness.

Yet Harold did not become happier. Instead, he became pervaded with uneasiness. The drama of Natalie was more persistent and more earnest than he wanted it to be, more demanding, more exacting and less tender. Perhaps, he thought, this was middle-age stripping love of its poetry and making it naked need. He thought it might be the years of habit, the years-old pattern of thoughts and reactions and customary attitudes of mind, the whole, leathery, uncrackable skin of age that encased this new love in him and stifled its expression. For it was love. He was in love again. There was no question in his mind about that.

"If it's not love," he told himself, remembering how persistently he pressed his presence on her, "then I sure am making a hell of a damn fool of myself."

Then he thought perhaps the uneasiness came from Amelia. She had inserted herself into his mind and was urging him on where he might not want to go. These fears and rufflings, these draggings and ripplings and trailings among his sensibilities—who then, if not Amelia? She was sitting on the banks of his bloodstream and trailing her toes in his blood! Who knew what shapes she could not assume? Who knew what wild places she could travel to? Who knew that she could not sit down to a mind and play it at will?

"The thing is," he told himself, "not to think," and he stopped thinking about Amelia. Then the uneasiness came to him out of the sea. He could not rid himself of a premonition that disaster would come to him from there. It came bursting towards him with the waves to the edge of his skin and, as it flattened, crashing and scattered with the waves and ran back with the waves into the sea, to gather itself for a new assault on him, he found he was setting himself against it. He had to fight a desire to run and throw himself at the disaster that seemed to be running and throwing itself at him. "I'm going out of my mind," he thought wildly and, when the emotion subsided, he thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to allow himself to go. His mind, he felt, hadn't been exactly habitable lately anyway.

His proposal to Natalie was abrupt and took even him by surprise. He had intended delaying until he could be sure she would accept, but he forgot. He forgot when they had known each other five days. They had been together constantly, but he had not kissed her yet, nor even taken her hand with affection. They were on a morning walk over the wet sand at the edge of the beach when he spoke. Up to then, their talk had been aimless. They had fallen silent for a moment and, in the silence, the sense of disaster sprang out of the sea and shook words out of him that he did not know he had been thinking.

His mind grappled with its premonition of disaster. His voice complained of the pain of greeting her and of bidding her goodnight. "All that," he went on, confusedly, "and then, in a little while, we won't even have breakfasts together when we go back to town, not except in case we're married by then, that is."

Her face flung towards him. "What's that?" she cried and sputtered and then said, "What did you say? I didn't get you."

He was facing her, but his eyes did not meet hers and he hardly saw her. A sensation like horror was in his mind and he knew suddenly the only reason he had had for delaying his proposal until he could be sure it would not be rejected. The reason had not been trivial. It had not been to spare his pride an injury or to spare himself an embarrassment. He had realized his danger. That was what it had been. He had realized that if Natalie rejected him he could not frisk off in search of someone else. He could not look for anyone else and he would not go back to loneliness. That was his danger. And if Natalie rejected him now, he knew the sea would be waiting for him and he thought, with voluptuous horror, the sea would not reject him.

"I'm not a boy any more," he said. He struggled to look at Natalie and to keep his voice calm and to find thoughts among the bombarding anarchy of his emotions. "You know that, of course—not a schoolboy any more, as you are familiar with me enough to know. But . . . but . . . and it's not spring, not the season tuning me up. My heart doesn't bubble with sap, not ordinarily, not because it's the season for that. But I find . . . that . . . I find that . . . I mean when you're not with me, my God, I can't bear it. I get so nervous I can't even breathe, I mean when you're not there."

He stood looking at her as he spoke. His feet were flat against the tough, wet sand, his back erect. His shoulders were squared and his arms stiff at his side, the fingers stretched stiff and spread wide. He had felt that, if he went on talking, he might talk out the uproar in him. But it grew worse. Her face seemed to hammer at his eyes. The sea growled and licked at his back. He did not hear his words for the sound of the sea and didn't know what he had said or that he had stopped talking. Then, suddenly, his eyes cleared. He saw Natalie, her face sprung open with consternation, flee backwards and, at that moment, the sea snaked up and fastened hissing on his ankles. For a lunatic instant, he thought Natalie was running from him and had left him to the sea. He opened his mouth wide to scream, but he made no sound. There was no breath in him for sound. Then he saw Natalie, safe from the water, looking at him and laughing.

His mind seemed to have dissolved and to be trickling down the back of his head into his neck. He walked toward Natalie slowly, on quaking legs, water squashing from his shoes. All the flesh of his body was quaking.

He began to stamp his feet angrily against the sand, as if stamping out the water.

"You looked so funny when the wave hit you," laughed Natalie, "with your mouth open like that." She opened her mouth and eyes wide and twisted her face with terror. "Now I know the kind of big manly athlete you are," she said. "I bet you stick your big toe into the water before going in and shiver all up." She minced one foot forward and clasped herself around and shuddered prettily.

"Yes," he said, and his voice quaked a little. "That's the kind of man I intend you to have for your husband."

The laughter left her face. Her hands unclasped and fell to her side. "I do it myself," she said. "I don't mind. I think it's cute."

He didn't look at her. He was looking down at his feet. "Then it's settled," he said awkwardly and heard what he had said and sprang towards her mumbling. "I've been sick for you," he mumbled as he kissed her.

❧

"You've got to marry her now!"

"Amelia! You darling! How wonderful! To come back just now when . . ."

"You've just got to, Harry. Got to! Really have got to!"

"Why did you stay away so long, so many months, when . . ."

"No, Harry! Now listen. Listen to me carefully with both your ears. Bring your mind into it, to me, and listen. You can't, that's all. God in Heaven, man, what are you thinking of to think such a thing!"

It was late evening. Harold was to marry Natalie at noon the next day. He had spent the afternoon drawing a new will and making her the beneficiary of his insurance policies. He was packed for the honeymoon. Tickets were in the pocket of his blue suit. With nothing left to do, he had been sitting before the living-room window in his apartment, thinking, placidly, how there was no bachelor dinner for him this time because, this time, there was no one to give it and thinking that he was glad, too. He wouldn't have been able to enjoy a bachelor dinner.

"What are you talking about?" he said. "I was just sitting here."

"Think of her. It would destroy her."

"Who? What would?"

"Everything's planned and announced and expected. What could she give as an excuse?"

"What excuse? What is this?"

"Her family knows. They've come all the way from Joplin for the ceremony. Her friends know. Her office knows. She's given up her job, trained her successor. She can't go back there now. How can you even think of doing such a thing to her!"

Think? What had he been thinking? He hadn't been thinking at all, just watching the night, the lights, the traffic and so forth, thinking of the bachelor dinner he had had long ago and of the friends he didn't have any more and of the drinking he used to do and of how he didn't drink now, that's all. And, oh yes, he had been thinking of how he could have been married to Natalie already if only she hadn't had so damn many obligations and hadn't been so fussy about her obligations. That was all. That was really all. There had been nothing else in his mind, no matter how deep down he would dig into it—watching the night, that's all, waiting for time to pass and wondering how tomorrow would go, all that silly business, sealing the bonds in heaven, and Natalie's mother crying, no doubt, and the plane ride after that and Natalie! And how he would look at Natalie all the time he could and drink in the look of her. He had been thinking of that, too, how he would fix the look of Natalie in his memory and wouldn't take his eyes off her, and some would say it was disgusting, but the hell with them, he'd be as disgusting as he wanted, and anyway there'd be others who would say, let me tell you, brother, that's love, let me tell you, he sure looks like he's in love, brother, can't even take his eyes off her a minute.

And he had been thinking how, if not for her damned feelings for her obligations, they would have been settled long ago and he wouldn't have been sitting lonely like this, watching the night. Yes, now, that was all. That was certainly all. He had dug down to the bottom of his mind and that was all that had been in it. Watching the night, the lights, the sky, the buildings, the traffic, the people, listening to the sounds, wondering which one was Amelia, wondering whether any sound going by in the night was Amelia or someone like her, wishing the wedding was over already and thinking it would have been long ago, down there at that dull little beach hotel last spring if he had had his way, and wondering, too, that's right, yes, that, too, hardly wondering, just sort of feeling, had he been rushing Natalie into this marriage so much, so insistently in order to rush himself.

His mind went blank. He shut out the memories of the thoughts he had had. "Do what?" he cried to Amelia. "Think what? I wasn't thinking anything, just sitting here."

"Think of it from her side," insisted Amelia. "You found her. You took her up. You took her out of her place in the world and put her by your side. That's what you did. Now you can't . . . simply can't. . . ."

"Say it! For Christ's sake, say it out! Can't what!"

"You know. You know yourself. Let her down."

"Down?"

"It would wreck her life, Harry. Just on the eve of the wedding like that. It wouldn't be easy for her to recover. Without any excuse for her to make."

"I don't know what, I mean. . . ." His hands fluttered helplessly.

"Besides," Amelia said, "you love her."

"You think so?"

"Of course you do. It's marked on your face. The smile. Remember the lamblike smile that comes over your face when you walk and embarrasses you when you feel it? Isn't that a sign? And the silences between you. What is that if not love? What else but love makes a warring male mind and female mind sleep peacefully alongside each other?"

He was shocked. "Do you see us, watch us all the time?" he cried.

"You think I have nothing else to do?"

"Some of the time, you mean? You can watch us any time you want, you mean?"

"I've a great deal to do where I am."

He looked away from her and remembered, shaken, how he had felt her in the air around him several times as he had made love to Natalie.

"I'm in the purgatory of it," Amelia continued. "It keeps me busy. You know what it's like? When anyone on earth thinks of us in any way, then we have to do what he thinks. That's the purgatory of it. And the things people think! My goodness, I have to do them all. I am sure if I had led a better life, they would not remember such things about me and think of me in such a way."

He rubbed his forehead tiredly. "What do you like to do, Amelia?" he asked. "I'll think it for you."

"No!"

He looked at her, surprised by the turbulence in her voice. Then he knew what she meant. "I will," he cried. "I'll think it for you."

"No! No! I won't tell you, can't tell you."

"Tell me and I'll think it. Whatever it is, I'll think it."

"You still hold on to this old corruption of yours, don't you, this old poisonous adventure. You're still in the middle of it, aren't you, stuck there and going deeper, aren't you."

"I'll think of you having dinner with me. I've thought that. Did you do it? Talking over the telephone. Did you do that? I didn't hear, didn't feel it."

"Harry, please!"

He began to go towards her slowly. He was smiling. His eyes were wet with tenderness.

"Don't touch me," Amelia cried and stepped back from him.

He held out both his hands to her. "I'll think of taking your face in my two hands," he said, "and feeling it sing in my hands and feel as if I'm holding the sound of music."

"Don't!" she said intensely. "If you touch me, you'll die. I'm dead, Harry. I'm all dead. I'm nothing. I'm death. You must love Natalie."

"I can't hold you? I can't take your hand?"

"No. Harry, listen. There's death in me. Love Natalie."

"I love *you*."

"You mustn't. It's unhealthy."

"I do. What can I do about it, when I do! I do love you, with more than my life, with my death."

"Yes, but in the meantime, there is life in you and life will make you love her. You will marry her and, you'll see, you'll not mind being alive. She will make a home for you in the suburbs, and children, and it will be agreeable there."

The week before he and Natalie had bought a house in the suburbs. He had looked forward to living in it, to getting away from the city and having grass of his own and quiet. Now, for the first time, it occurred to him how different it had been when he had married Amelia. He had mounted a different horse then and had ridden life down like a man with a sword and like a man with blood in his heart. There had been a career waiting for him to make it. There had been life waiting to be lived. Time had waited aching to be filled. Now it was another story. Now he was old and there was only death waiting. The world was old. The whole structure of society as he had known it was old. There was no career for him, only war. There was no activity or interest or emotion on earth that would not be smothered under the brute, rank, sweating-fleshed virility of war and its warriors. And time itself ached to be emptied of its moments. Well, as Amelia knew, as this heartless, bodiless, crafty, Machiavellian, fantastically skillful, blood-lusting witch of a woman had suggested, the suburbs would empty it.

"The 9:20 will carry you to the office," Amelia said. "The 5:05 will take you home. Bridge on the train with suburban cronies, the boys, men like yourself. . . ."

"Like me!" he cried in anguish.

"Like you'll be. Bridge will pass the train ride. Bridge will pass the evenings. A little garden, a hobby or so, stamp-collecting, riding, golf to get you outdoors, that kind of activity, and the children, of course—that will all help you pass the week-ends and help you pass your office time when the soldiers conquer that and make that unpleasant, more unpleasant than it is now. Yes, and you know. I'll tell you, it's true, you won't mind it. You'll like it and you won't want to change it. No one minds it and you won't mind it."

"So that's my sentence for the rest of my life, my life term?"

"You won't mind it. The time will pass and all that will help pass the time."

"But more! I wanted more. I had hopes and I wanted more. Where has all my hope gone? What happened to the man I expected to be? Where is he? Why wasn't he allowed to be? And what I thought . . . I thought my life would be . . . that I would have . . . and now! Buried? In a house in the suburbs? Is that what it is?"

"It will be nice to watch the children grow. They will give you responsibilities that will make you think about your work, no matter what your work gets to be like in the war, and so you'll be able to pass your time that way."

"And Natalie? Is that for her, too, that she will not mind it?"

"Oh, her! Why, she will love it. A house, servants, bridge parties, a position in the country club! Why, she will adore it. Gobble it up!"

"Then she doesn't love me either."

"Of course she loves you."

"Not what I was. Not what I could be."

"Of course, of course. And you love her."

"Do you know the truth? Do you learn the truth where you are? That's what I want to know if you know. You can do strange things."

"I do strange things? I do nothing." Amelia seemed to have started with guilt. "I try to help, that's all, but nothing else, whatever you think."

"Strange things I'd say. You can think my thoughts for me and make me feel things, I don't know what, wild things that I never felt before and that's not me, wild things from another world. But, the truth! Do you know the truth?"

Amelia had regained her calm. "It was love at first sight, wasn't it, practically that, practically the moment she saw you?" she said. "Instinctive, no thought in it, the real thing, free of calculations and figuring out and so forth. That must be the real, pure thing."

"Do you know, Amelia? That's the point that I'm asking. To know if you *know* is what I want!"

Amelia's brow wrinkled with thought.

"So you don't know!" cried Harold.

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "it's true she saw you at a fortunate time. Fortunate for both of you, of course, but for her, too."

"Fortunate! How fortunate?"

"Well, of course, a girl Natalie's age. . . ."

"Thirty."

"Nearer thirty-five."

"Thirty in September she said. She told me. I asked her and she told me. Eight years and eleven months difference between us."

"Yes, so she said, but she's nearer thirty-five. It's perfectly obvious she is and, for a girl of that age, it is unfortunate to have to take a vacation out of season. It might mean a year more out of her life without a chance to get married."

"To meet men, is that what you mean, because a vacation is to meet men and grab one up, is that it? Is that what you're saying, that she grabbed me up so fast, in five days, rather than wait a year for something better?"

"I didn't say anything like that! You put it in such a way! But you must realize, a girl like Natalie, that big-bosomed type, she can't hold her figure forever. She's pretty, but not very attractive and not very bright. You know yourself she has no position or background or education to speak of. Well, a girl like that—a vacation out of season might really be most unfortunate for her."

Harold drew himself up tall and scowled. "What are you trying to do?" he asked harshly. "What are you up to with this scheme of yours?" His harsh, bullying tone rose and then broke. "Amelia," he said brokenly, "what is it you're trying to do to me?"

"I'm trying to help you."

"You think so?" He looked away helplessly. "Is that what?" How, he thought, help me how? But he couldn't think, because of the picture Amelia had drawn of Natalie and of the life they would lead together. He began to go toward her. His eyes were strained with pleading. "Amelia," he whispered, "you really want to help me? Then go away."

He saw her mouth fall open. It looked like a black wound on her face and her face worked a moment around the wound like hurt flesh.

"I mean it," he whispered. "Go away!" He threw up his arm to his eyes and she vanished.

⁂

Harold stared open-mouthed at the spot from which Amelia had vanished. Her name wailed unexpectedly in his head. He stood a moment, curling in the soundless wail and, when it ended, his rage was gone. Despair was in its place. The flesh of his face sagged away from his eyes, and his lips hung loosely.

"Get drunk!" he said. "The hell with her," he thought. "Get drunk as hell." He remembered there was no liquor in the house and realized that he couldn't get drunk. His throat locked at the thought of drinking. He wouldn't be able to force a drink down himself. Not with a plumber's plunger!

"Amelia!" he wailed. He heard his cry burst across the silent apartment. "You've got me now, haven't you," he added soundlessly, "where you want me, haven't you, tight!"

He thought he'd kill himself and then she'd see, then the hell with her, and walked into the kitchen and turned on a gas jet and stood over the stove, waiting, breathing deep. The sound of escaping gas hit his ears. The smell licked the walls of his nose like a tongue and he turned off the gas jet and sniggered and looked around hysterically. He saw through the door to the telephone in the foyer. If she'd call me, he thought, if I heard her voice to bring me around! He meant Natalie. He went to the telephone and walked past it and up the hall and across the living-room to the front windows and stood there, high above the city, trying to think. He couldn't think. His mind jittered in his head. It quaked and jiggled, and hysteria swarmed in him and he thought he would just have to lean forward, that was all, just keep his hands in his pockets and lean forward, that was all. He'd lean a little more and a little more, lean far and lose his balance and go through the window, down and over and out!

Even as he leaned, he took a step backward from the window. He had to force his feet. He took another step backward and straightened up and turned his back on the window and then walked desperately to a chair and sat in it. He compelled himself into a position of ease. He crossed his legs and leaned forward and squeezed himself to keep down the jittering in his body.

"Nothing!" he said aloud. A thought began to form in his mind. "Nothing!" he shouted at it and swept his mind empty. He had used this method often to quiet himself for sleep. He would say "Nothing" to each thought that began until, at the drowsy end, he could not even think the word and would be asleep. He sat forward tensely. His thighs ground against each other and his body ground against them. A part of his mind watched for a thought to begin, another part watched to pounce on and obliterate the thought and a third, even more anxious, part, watched the watchers. "Nothing!" he said and waited, his mind crouched to pounce, and thought, "Nothing for me!" He slammed his fist against his knee. The pain and sound of the blow jarred his concentration, and a horde of thoughts flocked into his mind and teemed with struggle to become known. "Nothing!" he said and heard his voice rattle against the upthrusting, unthought thoughts. "Nothing! Nothing!" he cried frantically and scrambled to his feet.

"If she'd telephone!" he thought. "If I heard her voice!" He walked quickly down the hall to the telephone table in the foyer.

He picked up the telephone, listened to the droning dial tone for a moment and then shook the instrument as if trying to shake Natalie's voice out of it. "Call me up!" he cried. He returned the telephone to its base and stood over it, staring. The telephone was silent in the silent apartment. "Make your voice soft!" he pleaded in a low tone. "Blow soft in my ears. Cool." He clapped both hands to his head and felt his head storm beneath his hands. "Natalie," he wailed, "oh, Natalie, let me feel your voice in my head for one minute!"

The silence seemed to have arms. It seemed to stretch out its arms and take him up. She wouldn't call and he couldn't call her. He hadn't the right any more. He wasn't going to marry her. He couldn't. That was it. That was what all the uproar in him was about. Amelia had fixed it. She had fixed it cunningly. She had come for that purpose and had been pitiless, skillful and indomitable and had succeeded. If he thought of himself making love to Natalie, he must think of Amelia watching. Amelia had fixed that idea in him with deliberate cunning. If he had a memory of Amelia in his arms while he held Natalie in his arms, then Amelia would be in his arms with Natalie. Then he wouldn't know whom he was holding, what he was feeling. And how could he keep memories of Amelia, thoughts of Amelia, out of his mind! For an hour maybe, for a day or a week or a month maybe, but not for years. And if he thought of living with Natalie, he must think of the life Amelia had pictured, and must think of Natalie a few years from now as a fat, gabby lady-chairman of a suburban neighborhood clique. Amelia had done it. She had told him the truth deliberately, cunningly, murderously. Why? What did she have in mind for him? To keep him for herself? Because she still loved him? To revenge herself on him? Who knew why! What living human could tell what her desires were? He didn't know what Amelia had in mind for him. He could never know. He was helpless. His will was useless. He could only be what Amelia did to him.

So what now? What did Amelia want him to do now? He picked up the telephone and began to dial Natalie's number. He stopped midway. He couldn't tell her over the telephone. He couldn't tell her at all. He couldn't face her. He couldn't—not after this low, really blackguard thing he had to do to her. On the eve! On the very eve! With no slightest, face-saving excuse possible! Face-saving was important. It gave one something to do, a part to act, occupied one's mind. And Natalie would have nothing! Totally nothing!

He ran lightly, on tiptoe, up the hall and through the living-room to the library and got notepaper out of the desk and began to write hastily, without thought.

I can't explain, he wrote. *I'm sorry for you, and sorry for myself, for what I have to do to you. But I can't help it and can't explain. Don't think of me with love. Don't think of me. I'm a dream you had, a nightmare. I can't help it and can't explain, but my mind has been taken away from me by someone else and is being used to think with by someone else. I can't help it. I don't want to not to help it, be able . . .*

He lifted his head abruptly. He put down his pen and turned to face the room. The room was empty. Yet he knew something had come into the apartment and was approaching him. It couldn't be Amelia. He had never before been afraid when Amelia came. He got slowly to his feet and walked into the living-room. It was empty. He looked down the hall. It was empty. But something was in the house with him. He knew it. He ran out of the living room and into the bedroom where he kept a small revolver. The act of running seemed to poke up the panic in him. His hands scrambled like animals for the revolver in the drawer of the night table. He turned with it cocked and saw nothing.

Then his gaze was drawn to the floor. The nap of the rug was stirring. It was pressed down and gave off small, padded, pawing sounds. Something was moving along it. Something invisible, but with weight, was advancing on him. His breath stopped. All thought halted. An immense wave of fear muttered towards him and lunged roaring over him and seemed to smash him down and drench and engulf him and leave him shrunk and strangling. He could not lift his gaze from the floor. It was an interminable moment before he was able to raise his head and see Amelia standing before him.

❦

Harold looked at her mutely. Amelia seemed different now, and he remembered that when she had been there a little while before she had had the look of an illustration. She had had an attenuated, limpid kind of lifelessness and had been vulgar with elegance. Now she looked as she had on her death bed, exhausted and sad.

"I ought to be very cross with you," she said, "for making such a perfectly disgusting person out of me."

He didn't answer. He couldn't.

"How could you!" Her anger was small and plainly assumed to ease his terror. "Of course that's what always happens when anyone starts to idolize and idealize away from reality, but still I'm sure I never gave you any reason to make your memory of me so horrible!"

He began mutely to go towards her and she turned sideways. He shifted to face her. "You're Amelia," he said. His voice was muffled with fear. He realized now that the other one, the one who had been visiting him, had not been real. She had just been an image he had invented to talk to because . . . because . . . well, that was it, that was right, trivial, comically senseless, but correct . . . because he had been ashamed to talk to himself, had had too much dignity to be able to talk to himself. Now the real one had come. This was the dead Amelia standing before him. He took another step toward her and she stepped back. "Why have you come?" he whispered.

"Perhaps to clear my name." She tried to smile. "Also, maybe, because you are in trouble. Whatever made you think I could be such a conniving, homicidal prig as you made me out!"

"Is that why?" he whispered. "To take me with you? Is that why you came?"

"No! Certainly not!"

He continued to advance slowly and she continued to retreat. She was backing towards a corner of the bedroom and, as she neared the wall, she held up her hand. "Don't come nearer," she said.

He halted.

"It's dangerous," she explained, "in case we touch."

"I'll die?"

"Oh no." Amelia laughed. "No, you won't."

"That's what she told me, the other one. I mean that's what I thought, that I'd die if we touched. I must have known by instinct."

"Well, it's not so, because I won't let you touch me."

"But it's true? If we touch, I die?"

She shook her head stubbornly. "What of it, if it is true?" she said. "We won't touch." Again she tried to smile.

They were not more than a yard apart. One leap, a short leap, and they would touch. If he made one more step forward and she made one more step backward, then she couldn't escape. She'd be pinioned in the corner.

He'd only have to spread out his arms and legs as he leaped and, no matter how she dodged, she would have to touch him.

"So you see," she said, "you're at the end of your adventure now, aren't you, Harry?"

"Adventure? That's what she said, the other one, what I thought up for her to say. What adventure?"

He thought of shifting his weight from one foot to the other. If he did it once and then twice or three times, perhaps he could make the step forward without her noticing it. Perhaps she would make the step backward without noticing she had done so and be against the corner without knowing she was. Then he could shift his weight once and again and the last time he did so he would leap and pinion her.

"Your little adventure," she said, "the adventure against your sense of life. You've been tenacious with it, haven't you, and have carried it through with remarkable skill, devoted skill. But the end—you've not got to the end yet, have you? The end remains."

He shifted his weight from his right foot to his left. Perspiration broke out all over him. He could feel it stand upon his forehead and begin to slide down his face.

"One more step, no?" Amelia said, smiling. "One more step and your adventure will have its success."

"Step?" he faltered and shifted his weight again. His lips were dry and he licked them and looked, suddenly, crafty and greedy.

"One more thing to do. You poisoned your memory of what I was so you could draw poison even from that, didn't you, and created loneliness for yourself to draw poison from that and stopped all the reliefs from loneliness, didn't you, whiskey and relations with women, whatever could have eased it, and the idea was to milk all that of poison, wasn't it! Isn't that so? Then you took up this girl and drew poison from her and now you've got all the poison you need, haven't you, and now there's only one thing that you need to do, isn't there? Drink it! Isn't that right? Isn't that why you've collected all this poison, to drink it?"

His right hand still held the cocked revolver. Nervously, with his left hand, he wiped the perspiration from his chin and trailed his hand across his face and over his eyes and took a step toward her. "Drink poison?" he said. "Where is there poison here? The iodine, you mean, in the medicine closet?"

She was cornered now, but she did not seem to realize it. "Now I'm here!" she cried. Her voice exulted with triumph. "And now you will not drink it."

He shifted his weight. "The iodine? I never thought of . . . so painful." He shifted his weight nervously again.

"No!" Her voice trilled with triumph. "You never thought the whole thing, but only because you didn't want to. You hid it from yourself because . . ."

"That's true. I never imagined."

"Because you knew that, if you became aware of what you were doing, you wouldn't have done it, couldn't have done it."

"I guess so," he said, "suppose so," and leaped upon her. His widespread arms and flung-out legs smashed into the corner and he stood that way, eyes closed, body pressed hard against the wall. He opened his eyes slowly. The revolver was still in his right hand. He could see it against the wall. He could feel the wall pressed against him and smell the paint and plaster. He turned around. Amelia was standing behind him. He had not touched her. She had escaped somehow.

"Two places at once!" he gasped. "You can be?"

"You're shameless!" she said, exasperated. Her face was flushed with anger and then suddenly tears stood in her eyes. "What have you done to yourself, Harry, since I knew you!" she cried. "Where is your sense of life, Harry?" She stared at him imploringly. "What have you done to your sense of life, and why? What's the reason? Why do you do this, this fantastic adventure, invent this whole complication for yourself?"

"To go with you!"

"No! I know that's not right."

"That's what I want."

"You wouldn't have poisoned my memory like that with these guilty inventions of yours, if that was what it was."

"That's what! I want it! I want it! Take me with you, Amelia!"

She shook her head. "The war?" she said. "Was that what did it? Apathy over the end of the world you've been living in? You didn't like what the world had made of you? You didn't like lawyering and the kind of person the world had turned you into as a lawyer and the kind of person the changing world was going to make of you? Was that why?"

"To go with you, I tell you! I must. There's no other way for me. Amelia, don't you see!"

"You must marry Natalie. That's what I see!"

"I can't."

"She will help you live."

"Who wants that?"

"You have to live."

"No! Don't you see! No!" His hands sprang wildly through the air. He still held the cocked revolver and it sprang dangerously in the air with his hands. "Live as a lunatic?" he shouted. "Is that what you want? To be crazy desperate? To force myself into marriage with her and do God knows what to her and to myself? No! I can't! Don't you see I can't! For God's sake, Amelia, don't you see, not the plainest thing even!"

She stood pale and troubled. "Calm yourself, Harry," she said. "Sh-sh-ssssh." She stroked the air with one hand. "Try to quiet yourself a moment and look at it quietly. If you just wait till morning . . . that's the plainest thing . . . just till morning and you'll go on living the rest of your life."

"Is that what I get from you?"

"Harry, it's right, what I said, and if you just wait till morning, you'll see. . . ."

"Is that all you came to give me, junk like that, not to take me with you?"

"You must go on living. You have a responsibility now to Natalie."

"Again! Again! I have to go on listening to that again!"

He was stretched so tall he was shivering. Suddenly he burst into tears. "That's all you can do for me?" he said. The tears squirted from his eyes in large drops. "I didn't want it," he mumbled and, head lowered, walked backward slowly and sat down on the edge of his bed and wept noisily. When he looked up, Amelia was standing over him. She had come silently. "I didn't expect that from you, Amelia," he said. Her face was full of pity for him. She began sadly to bend toward him and he realized abruptly what she was going to do. His face became slack with fear. His mouth fell open. "I didn't think you'd say the same thing, kick me that way when I was down like that," he said mechanically. His words were a mumble in his open mouth. His gaze remained fastened on her pitying face as she bent closer. He felt almost as though fear shrieked in his eyes, and he closed his eyes and half rose and held up his mouth to hers. He lifted his right hand to hold her chin. Her kiss was cold on his lips. It thrust through his teeth, rammed past his tongue and exploded against the roof of his head.

A neighbor next door heard the report and used the house telephone to ask if it had been heard downstairs, where a blowout or a backfire might be expected. An elevator man came up and began to ring the bell. He was suspicious. He hadn't liked the look of Mr. Lammetter these last months. When the bell was not answered, the man called the night superintendent. After a passkey had provided access to the apartment, the police were summoned. The police marked the case D.O.A. and then closed it quickly. They found the note, observed that the victim's own revolver had been placed in the mouth and hardly waited to learn about the new will and the insurance policies. Before they could learn, Natalie read of Harold's suicide in the newspapers.

JOHN D. WEAVER

Oak Shadows

The creek, broadening at the big willow, crawled past the boy and the old man like a lazy lizard wriggling slowly through alder clumps. The narrow rapids above the tree left bubbly splotches of foam on the dark surface of the water. The boy watched the bubbles burst; they reminded him of fried eggs. Wouldn't it be funny if fried eggs suddenly started floating down Cass Creek? The boy laughed, and the old man, drowsing in the late summer sun, roused up, shaking the snake-doctor off the tip of his fishing pole.

"Somepun rubbin' yo' ticklin' bone?" the old man said, and the boy shook his head.

"I was thinkin' 'bout fried eggs," the boy said.

"Alla time hongry."

"No," the boy said, "no, I wan't hongry. I was jus' thinkin'."

The skin of the old Negro was dark and polished, the color of an old and well kept walnut chair. The boy's skin was lighter, a muddy yellow, like the creek after the first spring rains, when the eel-fishing is best. A large sycamore, struck down by lightning, lay sprawled across the creek like a heavy, sleeping arm, taping a band of shade across one corner of the flat rock on which the boy and his grandfather sat. A kingfisher lit for a nervous moment on a rotting branch of the sycamore. The boy threw a rock at the bird, and it flew down-creek, screaming. The boy went back to counting fried eggs, then pulled in his line, put on a fresh hellgrammite and threw the line straight out in front of him, watching it drift.

"I bet th' Lord could turn them foam bubbles int'r fried eggs iffen He had a mind to," the boy said, and the old man chuckled.

"Laws, I say He could," the old man said, scratching the steel wool under his black slouch hat.

"I'd hop in that creek an' eat me fifty dozen fried eggs," the boy said. "I'd swell up like th' ole mule got in Mister Fletcher's corn."

The boy puffed out his cheeks and stomach, then stretched flat on the rock, rolling over to watch the tiny black tadpoles peppering the muddy floor of the creek close in to the bank. He stirred the water with his hand, and the black specks scattered. The boy scrunched closer to the edge of the rock, driving the tadpoles further downstream; even the fat gray-green tadpoles were moving now, their tiny suck-mouths opening and shutting excitedly. The boy grabbed a stick from the creek bank and jabbed at the frightened tadpoles, churning the water.

"Here, boy, what you doin'?" the old man said.

"Chasin' tadpoles," the boy said.

"Why you doin' that?"

"I doan know." The boy dropped the stick; he twirled his fishing pole in his hand. "I reckon it's 'cause they chase so easy."

The boy shrugged; he glanced at the tadpoles shifting uneasily about in the clearing water, a tiny school of minnows flashing by above them. With a pointed stick, the boy thought, I could kill the tadpoles, squash the wormy insides out of them, just like you'd spatter a grasshopper under your foot or crush a lightning bug between your fingers.

"They just ain't takin' to hellg'mites today, I reckon," the old man said, filling his pipe.

The boy stared at the dead sycamore the lightning had sprawled across the creek. If, he thought, lightning ever hit me like that, I'd get blowed to bits, like a chipmunk if you held a shotgun right up to it. The boy threw the stick back in the alders.

"Somedays they won't take to nothin' but hellg'mites," the old man said, "an' then again somedays they won't bite nothin' but worms or crickets. Contrariwise."

The old man lifted the day's catch from the creek. The fish, a white string through their gills, had been flapping in the shallow water near the creek bank. There were four perch on the string, two big ones and two little ones, and there was one fair-sized bass and a chub. The bass and the chub were dead, and the bass was turning yellow from having been carried in the sun so far down-creek. The boy stared at the dead fish-eyes, dark and shiny, like Mr. Fletcher's when he was mad with one of his niggers.

"They'll sure fry up good," the old man said.

The boy wasn't hungry, not for fish, for living things.

"Could th' Lord make them fish come alive again?" the boy asked.

"Ain't I tole you what He done for Laz'rus?" the old man said.

"Even th' bass?" the boy said. "Even after it's turned yell'r?"

"Hit's th' Lord as turns it yell'r," the old man said, "an' I reckon th' Lord could un-turn it, iffen it pleasured Him to do it." He used to be a preacher, the old man, had his own church over west of Sperryville.

The boy curled the moist bark of his fishing pole with the nail of his thumb.

"Jus' 'member how th' Lord split open that river, furrowed right through th' water like you'd trench across a garden," the old man said.

The boy stared at the flat darkness of the creek, waiting for the waters to part.

"See that big ole syc'more stretched 'cross th' creek?" the old man said. "Well, th' Lord could stick His fist down an' snatch up that ole tree jus' as easy as you'd scoop up a springkeeper."

The boy swallowed hard. The sycamore was bigger around than two telephone poles.

"That tree ain't no more'n a match-stick to th' Lord," the old man said. "Th' bigges' things in th' world looks little to Him, even th' whole Shen'doah Valley ain't no more'n a li'l blue trough like'n th' pigs eat out of."

On the clay path behind them they heard the uneven clump of heavy shoes, the proud and angry limp of Mr. Fletcher. They waited for the familiar bark of his voice. The ragged clumpety-clump veered from the path toward the creek, twigs snapping under the shoes with a brittle sound like that of small bones breaking.

"Mornin', Jim."

"Mornin', Mister Fletcher."

"Fishin'?"

"Yassa, fishin'."

Mr. Fletcher was a small man with a dark, sullen face and huge brown hands. He wore riding pants and the black leather boots a man in Washington made for him. The boots cost fifty dollars a pair. They helped cover up his limp. Mr. Fletcher stood back from the flat rock, his good foot pressed forward, the other half hidden behind it. He was smoking a curved briar pipe.

"You been b'havin' yoursef?" Mr. Fletcher asked the boy.

The boy nodded; he was fluttery inside, like katydids. He tried to smile the special smile he had for white people.

"You ain't been getting in my melon patch?" Mr. Fletcher's voice was husky, and rougher than pine cones.

The boy shook his head. Mr. Fletcher laughed and flipped the boy a quarter. The coin made a spinning flash of silver in the mid-morning sun.

Mr. Fletcher whirled around on his good foot, clumpety-clumped down the path. The old man went back to his fishing. He didn't feel hate for Mr. Fletcher any more; he didn't feel anything much now, except tired. He sure felt tired.

"I was wonderin'," the boy said, making X's on the rock with the base of his fishing pole, "I was wonderin' if th' Lord was a white man or a cullud man."

"Th' white people says He's white, an' th' cullud people says He's cullud," the old man said, "an' I reckon th' truf of it's somewheres in between, like it gen'rally is."

"Sort of a b'twixt color?" the boy said, looking at his bare arms, waffle-colored.

"I reckon."

The boy skimmed a flat rock on the smooth surface of the creek; the rock skipped three times with tiny splashes, then sprang like a catamount into the bushes along the opposite bank.

"You reckon my mama's in heaven?" the boy asked.

"Course she is," the old man said, and he patted the small yellow hand flat on the rock beside him.

"If Mr. Fletcher dies'n goes to heaven, will mama go to work for 'im again?"

"Laws, son," the old man said, chuckling, "they ain't gon' be no work in heaven, an' nobody's gon' pay 'tenshun to who's white an' who's cullud."

The old man rebaited his hook, running the point up under the hard black collar of the hellgrammite.

"They jus' ain't bitin' today," the old man said.

"Would they be holes in her back where she was shot?" the boy asked, and the old man shook his head.

"She'll be jus' like she was th' day she marrit Blue Williams," the old man said. "Wif white daisies in 'er hair, an' a white dress so long it swep' th' church floor."

"Doan it git dirty, around th' bottom, I mean?"

"Oh, maybe it picks up a li'l gold dust," the old man said, smiling down at the boy. "You know how 'tis up there in heaven, th' gold kinda crumbs up on them streets sometimes, an' when you walk along you kick up a gold powder, jus' like th' gray dust along th' Cassville pike."

"Are th' daisies gold, too?"

"Only in th' middle. Th' li'l round part's gold."

The boy lay flat on his back, staring up at the white clouds; they were like the tails of big rabbits. The old man sucked on his pipe, and the boy looked for a long white dress in the thinning cloud shapes.

"Will Blue Williams be there, too?" the boy asked. He never called his mother's husband anything but Blue Williams.

"I ain't th' one to say where Blue Williams' at," the old man said, "but I reckon they ain't no pow'r on heaven'r earth could keep 'im away from Sally Fletcher."

"Why's your name Fletcher," the boy asked, "your'n an' mama's?"

" 'Cause we useta belong to th' Fletchers."

"Doan we belong to 'em now?"

"No," the old man said. "Nobody belongs to nobody else now. Not thataways."

"Oh."

There were white daisies in the sky now, the boy could see them as plain as the cedars on the hill across the creek.

"Didn't they burn Blue Williams?" the boy asked, and the old man nodded.

"Then," the boy went on, "how's he gon' go walkin' round them gold streets?"

"Doan you worry nor fret, son. They ain't no fires, not even th' fires a hell, could stop Blue Williams from gittin' to where Sally Fletcher's at."

The old man struck at a snake-doctor with the tip of his pole. He was trying not to think of that night, trying not to hear Sally's scream. He had hidden in the rocks on the hillside above Mr. Fletcher's pasture; he'd seen the men come up to the big whiteoak, leading Blue Williams by a rope, like you'd lead a mean bull back to the barn. He'd seen Sally streak across the pasture, screaming like a wounded night-hawk, and then he'd heard the shots and seen his daughter slump down on the thick oak roots that stuck up out of the ground. Nobody ever knew who shot Sally Fletcher; most people around Creek Orchard said it was probably some kid got excited when she came running out in the pasture yelling thataway. Mr. Fletcher picked the girl up and limped home with her in his arms, dragging his crippled foot through the dry grass. He carried her all the way, wouldn't let anybody else touch her. People said it was real wonderful how such a small man could carry a body so far, almost a mile and a half.

"It happened a long time ago," the old man said.

"What?"

"Nothin'. I was jus' thinkin' out loud, kind of."

It happened so long ago, and Mr. Fletcher wasn't to blame about Sally getting shot, not directly anyways. The old man relit his pipe, flicked the match in the creek; it made a snake-hiss. The old man had lived longer than his hate, and sometimes he understood how Mr. Fletcher must have felt when Blue Williams went on and married Sally even after Mr. Fletcher ordered him off his land, warned him not to come anywheres near Sally Fletcher again. Blue Williams was a stubborn black mule sometimes, the way he pranced around. When Mr. Fletcher said he didn't want nobody marrying Sally Fletcher, Blue Williams should of been careful, he shouldn't of talked back to Mr. Fletcher.

"They say Blue Williams could take holt a th' front axle of a Ford car an' lif it up like it didn't weigh no more'n a empty tomato crate," the boy said.

"He was a strong man, a powerful strong man."

"They say they wan't no weight at th' county fair Blue Williams couldn't lif up."

"Thas th' truf, son. I seen him do it." The old man knocked his pipe out against the rock. Blue Williams, he was thinking, hadn't looked so big hanging from that oak limb like a string of drying beans.

"He was bigger'n stronger'n Mr. Fletcher, wan't he?" the boy asked.

"He'd of made two Mr. Fletchers, wif enough lef over to make a li'l sprout th' size a you."

"He could a kilt Mr. Fletcher, I bet, just like you'd take an' wring a ole hen's neck."

"He was a powerful big man, they ain't no two ways about it."

But, the old man was thinking, they ain't no man's strength that does much good against fifty men with shotguns and a rope.

"I reckon we best be gittin' on home," the old man said. "It jus' looks like this ain't th' day to be astin' them fish to come eat a hellg'mite dinner wif us."

The boy watched the old man draw the string of fish up from the water, and then he rolled the fishing lines up on the poles.

"Th' Lord could make that string so heavy I bet you couldn't lif it," the boy said.

"He sure fed a messa people one Sunday wif jus' a couple ole fish-heads an' some lef-over bread," the old man said.

The boy followed the old man down the path, which was too narrow for them to walk side by side. Nothing had changed. The sycamore still stretched across the creek; the foam bubbles still floated slowly down-creek, bursting in the sunlight. There were still only four perch on the string, and one chub and a yellowing bass, flat and stiff as a shingle. Nothing had changed; it was as though the old man's God were asleep, or didn't care.

The boy stared down at the clay path where the old man's shoes had half blotted out the print of Mr. Fletcher's boots. The old man's shoes were too big for him; they'd belonged to Blue Williams and the old man had stuffed rags in the toes to help make them fit. The print of Blue Williams's shoes beside Mr. Fletcher's fifty-dollar boots was like the round hoof-hole of a bull alongside the paw-print of a collie pup. The boy tried to imagine the bigness of Blue Williams, a black oak tree towering over sumac. To keep up with his grandfather, the boy began to run, hopping down the clay path on his good foot, dragging the heavy weight of the other, the one that had been born dead.

EDITA MORRIS

Horse with Hoof of Fire

Papacito, Little Father, we kill pig tomorrow. Come early, she had written, and sent the scrap of paper up the lake with the fishermen. To old Badilla, wading out to meet them, the pescadores' white-sailed vessels looked like a cluster of butterflies swarming out of the sunset. But then anything connected with his daughter made him think of light, pretty things. The glow of the fallen sun swept up men and boats in a last burst of color, and as he trudged back over the ribbed sands, glazed with a thin film of phosphorescent water, night fell. He seemed to hear the sun's red fire hiss as it was being put out.

He set off instantly. His old man's brittle feet were his sole means of conveyance; he knew that if he were to hurry them, they would pitch him into holes or send him tripping into the ditch. He put his box of wax matches in the crown of his sombrero, together with tortillas and tangy red peppers. When the road turned into ruts he would strike his wax matches one by one, like little private stars. By their precious light he would munch his tortillas, his back against a stone.

But now in a few hours he would be eating pig again! Very good it would be to sit and gnaw at a pig—a little tender one, he thought. It was a year since he had tasted meat. He pulled down his serape, drawn almost to his eyes because of the cold night air, and felt about in his mouth for his one remaining tooth. It was still there, ready for crunching pig crackle. A real king of a tooth, he had always thought.

His feet gathered speed. The landscape over which he journeyed was vast and generous, shrugging its mountain shoulders at everything that was petty. This immense shrug pleased him; it expressed something deep within himself. His Mexico was a country that always had shaken off its governments and powers when they became too burdensome, had purged itself with wholesome revolutions when its organism grew clogged. Old Badilla liked the feel of his sierra's broad hips and of his mountain's firm chest as he strode along them; he could hear the land's lungs draw deep breaths in the night.

The moon came up. He gave it a nod, meaning, you'll be helping me to save my little wax matches! But a moment later he had to strike the first one, catching sight of a drunkard's body sprawled across his road; over it hovered buzzards, and a stray dog, weeping hungrily from old habit, nosed at the bare toes. The dog's stumpy forelegs ill matched his soaring hindquarters, which belonged to a different breed entirely; one limb, crippled by rickets, trailed behind like a crooked twig. Badilla threw a pebble at it. Then, very gently, he rolled the drunkard off the moon-bathed patch on which he lay; he knew that men went blind from lying in the full lunar light. The *zopilotes,* their beaks coated with putrefied liquid from some former victim, made off in a lopsided, ungainly flight across the moon.

His path veered off into volcanic country. Out of black lips of stone a torrent gushed forth with the brashness of an urchin's stream of spittle. The hard spray, flung back from the surrounding rocks, made old Badilla stop and ponder. Given the steepness of the pass through which those waters had come pouring, he supposed that their uproar was not sheer bravado. His own life had torn through similar gorges, making a very extravagant noise at times. Like the river's life, it had been a full one, following the curves of his hot male blood and the fates of his turbulent country. In spite of instants of high grief, he would not have wished it otherwise.

As his steps dipped into the valley, the waters of the torrent flowed in a broad river bed beside him. Badilla wondered if his own life would ever run so sweetly and so smoothly. He thought not; he saw no signs of it. And now there was a war again—a great new war which would leave no life untouched! He felt a moment of apprehension, but as he made way for a cowherd driving his oxen to slaughter, his anxiety subsided. The still, heavy-footed beasts radiated serenity as they trod on towards their annihilation. Hearkening to their steps and to the cowherd's clear confident voice singing in the night, old Badilla likewise began to sing softly as he walked along.

He had stridden through many of the night's long hours when the scaffolding of an unfinished house reared its beams before him. Amidst piles of planks he saw a youth moving about, clad only in sun-ravaged trousers in the cold Mexican night. The boy's dark hair, starting an inch above the brow and growing far down the neck, covered his head like a helmet of black flowers with distended petals. When his eyes met Badilla's they were as frightened as a starved coyote's caught stealing a hen. The punishment for taking lumber was severe, yet when the young man braced himself to speak, Badilla felt that he would not be lied to. "These planks I'm taking are for my father's coffin," he said defiantly. Though the voice was off-key and shrill as a child's with terror, the black eyes looked firmly into Badilla's.

The old man leaned his back against the unfinished doorway. His face was like a mosaic of wrinkles as he scrutinized the forlorn-looking figure of the youth, twirling his sombrero, with a horseshoe and three little bells embroidered on it. The boy's full lips, colored purple like the meat of the mamey-fruit, opened and closed on breaths of terror when Badilla shifted his glance to the moon-washed planks that lay between them. Badilla, without a word, bent to hoist the boards upon his shoulder, motioning the youth to seize the other ends. From the boy there escaped a little moan of gratitude. "Now, *muchacho*, it's you who must lead the way," said Badilla, and he put spirit into his voice and comradeship into his gaze.

But as they plodded down the road together, he found himself lowering his eyes. It hurt them too much to look at that back, so strikingly like the back of young Emiliano, the last of his three sons to be killed in Obregon's revolution. It was always Emiliano's dapper young back receding down a road that Badilla kept seeing in his mind. Perhaps that was natural, he thought, for after the day that he watched him marching off to fight, he never saw his face again.

The youth made a sign that they should lay down their planks. The dead man's shack, built of organ cactuses, with intertwining cornstalks for roof, leaned toward them across a ditch. At his end of the lake, Badilla was accustomed to attending wakes: fine ones where the corpse rested on a mattress, and ordinary ones where it reposed on a *petate* of straw. In the stark abode that they now entered, the body lay on the bare earth, and had not even the comfort of candles. Badilla might have trod on the dead man's stomach, blown up as a balloon in death, had not the moon's rays guided his steps.

As he stood sniffing for the odor of coffee customary at wakes, he became aware of the bereaved family squatting in a circle by the dead man's head. The group looked like a gnarled tree trunk with desiccated branches. With arms like boughs, three small maidens clung to a stunted woman, whose mouth stood wide open in a question that would never be answered. Her worn feet under the hems of her skirts resembled terrified animals in the way they convulsively dug into the mud floor.

Badilla knew that no word had been found that could be used at such a moment. Removing his sombrero, he produced from its crown his tortillas and his little red peppers. When the three maidens, like ravenous foxes, pushed their faces in the gritty dough, he was glad that the father had his eyes closed to their hunger, and to all hunger on earth. He fumbled for the box of wax matches and, slipping them into the widow's fingers, stepped out quickly on the road.

The ruts, plowed deep in the rainy season and hardened in the drought, caused him to stumble. Then he felt a hand under his elbow and swung sharply about. "Emiliano!" He stopped himself, coughing embarrassedly. His old man's mind had been playing tricks on him! Somehow this youth's tall stature, his hair like dark leaves, and the touch of his eager hand brought his youngest son back to him with a vividness that made his heart contract. A feeling of quiet joy seeped through his body as the youth guided his tired footsteps. How well they walked together, the boy adjusting his stride so that they kept perfect time! Suddenly old Badilla wanted this thin boy to have a big cut of pig meat—the very piece that his daughter would be reserving for him: the best one, with the most crackle on it. Amazingly easy it was to persuade himself that he wanted no meat at all—though he had been trudging twelve miles to get it—really wanted nothing except to walk arm in arm with this tall youth along a road without end.

The empty space between heaven and earth began to fill up with light. Through the early morning haze Badilla caught sight of his daughter, Lupita, scanning the dawn for his coming. He knew when she recognized him by her quick burst of laughter, and it seemed to Badilla that her breath perfumed the air—as though her lungs were beds of flowers. Taking her arm as he walked on between her and the youth, he experienced a rare sensation of fulfillment. He felt imbued with a wisdom that had its origin in torrents and sierras, and in a cowherd's song, and a woman's weeping, and in young people's love.

The matador de puercos, the professional pig sticker, was already at work. Beside him in her wide skirts squatted Badilla's sister, Milagros, plying the fire with charcoal. She was old—people said a hundred—and nearly blind; for some time Lupita had looked after her to stop her from walking into rocks and trees that would splinter her chalk-dry bones.

Badilla sank down on the grass a short distance from the others. He leaned his head against the trunk of a eucalyptus tree and dozed a bit, while he followed the happenings with one eye. Very fine it was to watch things and to ponder on them, he thought!

Pinioned between the legs of jovial Paco the matador, the game little pig kept burrowing for food till his last moment. When the snout was jerked upwards and one foreleg lifted high, he only winked up trustingly through his white eyelashes. Then the knife's blade flashed briefly, piercing the heart in one stroke. As Paco extracted the knife, the long, drawn-out wail issued forth simultaneously. The matador, his slender hands clad in gloves of blood, lifted the small limp animal and plunged him into the cauldron above the fire. Quickly the scalding water softened the bristles, and the pig was hung by its neck from the eucalyptus bough above Badilla's head.

Again the knife went to work. Slitting a circle around the belly, Paco peeled off the black skin as though it were a woolen sweater. Badilla thought that the dangling pig, his head inclined sideways, looked like a tired little boy being undressed before going to bed. The little fellow was all naked except for his bristly black pants! Now these, too, came off, and the open chest was robbed of its crimson treasures. Heart, liver and kidneys appeared one by one, to be ranged on the ground in an even row; upon the black grass, they seemed like fantastic flowers, flaming red and still quivering. Old Badilla, tossing the warm heart in his palm, had a strange smile. He peered at the knife-slit through which life had fled like a sigh a mere second ago. How simply, how easily, death came! Why were men so afraid of it?

Over the brazier's fire Lupita prepared the *chicharron,* the golden-hued pig crackle. A speck of fat leaped to her chin, calling forth that happy laughter which Badilla thought must fall like a drop of clear water into a young man's heart. The youth's gaze rested on her face, and she closed her eyes so that the lashes beat against her cheeks like dark moths. When she looked up, she handed the boy a piece of *chicharron* with a gesture as if she were handing him her own self. Badilla saw that it was indeed that piece, the choicest and the largest, that she always reserved for him. Heaving a sigh of profound satisfaction, he sat with eyes fixed dreamily on the lake, on which the fishing boats were returning with the dawn. He surrendered himself to an old man's revery and saw in his mind's eye grandchildren sleeping in the shadow of a young mother's hair and a youth with a strong back planting the yearly corn. Fullness of the heart he saw, and long years of peace.

The rumbling of a bus sounded distantly. Old Milagros, packing the remains of the pork for market, and Paco, wiping his knife on a tuft of hay, halted their tasks to listen. They all heard the bus stop beyond the cactus fence, and a moment later saw Arnulfo, the conductor, sauntering across the yard. This Arnulfo never thought anything of keeping his passengers waiting while he laughed away a quarter of an hour with friends. Now he had come to fetch Milagros' pork for delivery in the next town and to leave a turkey for fattening. Waiting hopefully to be given a piece of *chicharron,* he smiled from one to the other and danced a little *jarabe,* which he accompanied with his conductor's whistle. Under his arm the turkey trumpeted, kicking him in the stomach with its knobby feet.

As he pirouetted gaily, the newspaper tucked in his belt fell to the ground. The great red letters stared up at them. LA GUERRA! LA GUERRA! Your country needs you. Young men of Mexico to arms! Instinctively the small group by the eucalyptus tree drew together, as if they might gain protection from each other. Understanding little, ignorant as to whether this war would strike them tomorrow or in a year, they were aware only of the approach of terror. Their heads were lifted by a common impulse springing from the dark wells of their racial inheritance as they hearkened to the sound. Always wars and revolutions had come that way, like thunder pounding nearer, ever nearer. Inexorably closer, almost bearing down upon them, the Horse with Hoof of Fire was galloping, and the sparks from his iron-shod hoof were igniting their peaceful fields.

With a movement that was compulsory, elemental, the youth beside Lupita swung around to face the oldest man in the group. His eyes sought Badilla's, imploring explanation and assurance. Father, I don't understand! What is the meaning? Yesterday I lost my own father. Today we met. Tomorrow I may be taken away to die. But that cannot be the way of life!

There was a withdrawn look on old Badilla's face. Ah, yes, yes, that is the way of life, it seemed to say. Until today we didn't know each other; now we'll part. So all will be as it was before. When I lost my three sons, one by one, that thought lent me strength. I had received them as a gift—then they had been taken from me. How could I lament?

Smiling deeply, Badilla gazed at the youth. It is right, Son, he wanted to say to him. You must go if they need you. You are a man, Son, and it is good to be a man. Yes, it is good to be a man! The great word made Badilla stand very upright, very still, almost as though he were standing at attention.

PAUL PETERS

Nat Turner

CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

STASIA, Nat Turner's wife
REDIC, her 7-year-old son
THE PEDDLER
SALATHIEL FRANCIS, Stasia's master
JOSEPH TRAVIS, Nat Turner's master
JIM PRESS, the overseer
NAT TURNER
HIGHGRASS
WILLIE WITCHER
PEACHY CASH
WAGONER SAM
DRED, brother of Highgrass
BLACKSMITH NELSON
NAOMI
HARK
WADE HAMPTON
COLONEL GRAHAM EPPES
CULBERT RYLES, his son-in-law

SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Cabin Ford Hollow in the Great Dismal Swamp on the Virginia-Carolina border, early in August, 1831.
Scene 2: Stasia's Cabin on Salathiel Francis' plantation, two weeks later.
Scene 3: The same, five days later.

ACT II

Scene 1: The swamp, the following Sunday.
Scene 2: Stasia's cabin, Sunday night.
Scene 3: Salathiel Francis' home, the same night.

ACT III

Scene 1: Col. Eppes' house, the same night.
Scene 2: The swamp, the same night.
Scene 3: Jerusalem jail, ten weeks later.

Copyright, 1940, by Paul Peters. All reprint, stage production, broadcast, public reading and movie rights are strictly reserved and may not be exercised without the author's permission.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Twilight at the edge of the Great Dismal Swamp on the Virginia-Carolina border, early in August, 1831.

A barefoot Negro woman enters, followed by a barefoot negro boy of seven. She stops, looks stealthily around.

REDIC: I'm tired, mammy.
STASIA (First scanning the clearing): We'll be going home soon.

(She mounts a hummock, faces the densest part of the swamp, and whistles three times, low but clear, the call of the bob-white.)

REDIC: Pappy coming here, mammy?
STASIA: You hush.

(She takes a parcel from under her skirt and hides it in the tall marsh grass at the foot of a tree.)

REDIC: That for pappy, mammy?
STASIA: Hush, I tell you.

(Again she mounts the hummock, again whistles three times. She listens for an answer.)

REDIC: Why they going to whip pappy?
STASIA: Ain't nobody going to whip pappy. . . . Who say that?
REDIC: Willie Witcher say Marse Francis going to stripe the hide off pappy with the bullwhip.
STASIA (Goes to the boy, takes him roughly by the arm): Listen, boy. You seen nothing and you heard nothing. Understand?
REDIC (Awed by her tone, but truthful): Uh-unh.
STASIA (Shaking him roughly): You say like I tell you. Anybody ask you, you go in swamp to pick huckleberries. Now—what you do?
REDIC: I go in swamp to pick huckleberries. . . . But I ain't got no huckleberries.
STASIA: You seen that puff adder and spill 'em.
REDIC: I wasn't afraid of that puff adder. No puff adder going "sssss" can scare me.
STASIA: You can say you was, can't you?
REDIC: Why?
STASIA: Pickaninnies don't ask why.
REDIC: White boys ask why.
STASIA: You ain't no white boy.
REDIC: Marse Francis say: "I never want my pickaninnies to forget their hands was give 'em by God for pulling up weeds." And I tell that to pappy, and pappy say Marse Francis lie.
STASIA: Yes, your pappy talk big—and look where he is now.
REDIC: Where?
STASIA (She has seen something at the edge of the swamp; she stops and stares): Hush, I tell you.
REDIC: Where is pappy?

(For answer, *Stasia* reaches out and pulls him against her skirt. He is frightened but also curious. He tries to turn his face, but she presses it into her skirt. They stand that way a moment.)

STASIA: Who there?

(A little old hunchbacked man steps out of the thicket with a tobacco-stained beard. He laughs, chuckles, cackles and spits tobacco all the time he talks.)

MAN: Just me.

(*Stasia* stares at him but doesn't answer. A pause, filled by his chuckle.) Kinda late for a gal to be out in the swamp, ain't it?

(No answer; so he chuckles and spits.) There's a patroller by the bridge. Better watch going home.

REDIC: We go in the swamp to pick huckleberries.

MAN: I'll give you a nickel for those huckleberries.

REDIC: A nickel!

MAN (Taking a nickel out of his pocket, holding it up): Five cents, United States money.

REDIC (After a pause): I seen a puff adder and spill 'em.

MAN: Ah, no puff adder going "ssss" can scare you.

STASIA (Clutching the boy): Hush, you!

MAN (Chuckling): No need to be afraid of me.

(No answer.) You know who I am, don't you?

(No answer.) You bought a ribbon from me yesterday.

STASIA: Didn't buy no ribbon.

MAN: What's your name?

STASIA: I'm Marse Francis' nigger.

MAN: Know Naomi Eppes, don't you? *She* bought a ribbon.

(No answer. He laughs.) Sure, everybody knows me. And I know everybody. You, now: You're Nat Turner's woman.

(*Stasia* throws a frightened look at him, snatches the boy's hand and runs off like a deer. The man watches them, chuckles, then goes to the tree and digs up *Stasia's* bundle. He opens and sniffs at it.)

MAN: Two hunks of salt pork . . . three hard-boiled eggs . . . four, five, six, seven, eight, nine corn pones.

(He smells.) Ummmm.

(Just then, far off, comes the bob-white whistle. He answers three times. Again, and again he answers. Slowly he wraps the parcel up and hides it under the tree where he found it.)

(Suddenly, he hears voices and underbrush sounds from the opposite direction from which the whistle came. He quickly takes some newspapers from his coat pocket and wraps them up with the food. A moment later three white men enter with guns.)

SALATHIEL FRANCIS (The tallest and best dressed): All right! Don't let him get away.

(The three men surround the hunchback, their guns up. He turns his head to look at them.)

MAN: Howdy do? Nice evening, ain't it?

SALATHIEL: I told you it was a signal.

MAN (Gives the bob-white call): You mean that? That's a signal?

(He laughs.)

SALATHIEL: One more peep out of you. . . .

(He takes a step forward and lifts the gun.)

MAN: No peeps, no peeps.

SALATHIEL: Where's your gun?

MAN: Gun? What would I have a gun for?

SALATHIEL: Who you whistling to?

MAN: A bird. A bird went . . .
(He whistles.) So I went. . . .

(He whistles again.)

(*Salathiel* seizes him by the collar so roughly that he drops to his knees.)

SALATHIEL: Listen, you crooked little toad. . . .
JOSEPH TRAVIS: You won't get anything out of him that way, Salathiel.
JIM PRESS: That's what I think, Mr. Francis.
SALATHIEL: I don't pay you to think.

(*Joseph Travis,* tactfully ignoring *Salathiel,* goes over to the man and helps him up.)

JOSEPH: Come on, old man, get up.
MAN: Thank you. Thank you, sir.
SALATHIEL: He doesn't live around here. He talks Yankee.
JOSEPH: Where are you from?
MAN: Salem, Massachusetts.
SALATHIEL: Massachusetts. Don't suppose you ever heard of a man named Garrison?
MAN: Garrison? I'm afraid, sir, I'm not acquainted with your friend, Mr. Garrison.
SALATHIEL: No. And you never read a filthy sheet named *The Liberator?*
MAN: *The Liberator?*
SALATHIEL: No. But just the same I'm going to search you. Search him, Jim.
MAN: You know me, Jim Press. I sold you a whip the other day.
JIM PRESS (Flashing a memorandum book from his inside pocket, passing it on to *Joseph Travis*): I get paid to do what I'm told.
MAN (Pointing to *Salathiel's* gun in his face): Sure that won't go off?
SALATHIEL (To *Joseph*): What is it?
(To man.) Don't play dumb, old man. You got fox all over your face.
JOSEPH (Perusing the book): Names of all our niggers.
MAN: And good customers, too. Willie Witcher, Naomi Eppes, Wagoner Sam. . . .
SALATHIEL: Customers for what? The underground railroad?
MAN: I don't sell excursion tickets. But I got Bibles, I got bonnets. . . .
(He slides into a chant.) I got sugar,
I got shoes,
Got everything that good folks use.
Oh, come and buy it,
Come and buy it, buy it, buy it, buy it,
From the Yankee peddler,
Yo-o-oh, Yankee peddler.
SALATHIEL: Peddler! What are you peddling in the swamp?
PEDDLER: Hunting for a spring. Got to have water, water for me and Fanny. Fanny's my mare. She's watching the cart on the road.
SALATHIEL (After a pause): Let him go, Jim.
PEDDLER: Thank you. Thank you kindly, sir.
JOSEPH: If you see any runaway niggers hereabouts—there's a hundred dollars reward.
PEDDLER: You mean Nat Turner?
SALATHIEL: What do you know about Nat Turner?
PEDDLER: Prime field hand. Worth a thousand dollars. Six-foot-three and powerful. Smart, too. Too smart to be a slave, your niggers say. You see, I know everything. An old dog gets in every garbage pail.
SALATHIEL: This county's one pail you better get out of, old dog.

JOSEPH: We don't like Yankee peddlers down here. Preach sedition to our niggers, all of them.

SALATHIEL: We tarred and feathered a theological student in Richmond last spring for selling anti-slavery tracts in Bibles. So, if I were you, old man, I'd turn Fanny around and peddle my sugar and shoes up north.

PEDDLER: Thank you, sir. That's good advice. I'll do that.

SALATHIEL: Run along now. And don't let me hear of you selling to my niggers again.

PEDDLER: Indeed I won't. Good night, gentlemen.

(They watch him leave in silence.)

SALATHIEL (Calling after him): And when you get to Boston, tell that polecat Garrison we've posted $5000 for his head—on or off the vine.

(Silence.)

JOSEPH: It's getting dark. Let's go home.

SALATHIEL (As they leave): I still smell fox.

(After they are gone, a powerful Negro enters carefully. His shirt and trousers are ripped by briars. His bare feet are caked with mud. He digs up the parcel planted by *Stasia*. He finds the papers hidden there by the peddler. He is surprised and troubled by them: turns them up toward the twilight coming down through the trees to see them. Then, as if by instinct, he whirls about, snatches a broken limb from the ground, and stands facing the *Peddler*, who has silently returned.)

PEDDLER: No need to be afraid of me, Nat Turner.

NAT TURNER: Stand here.

PEDDLER: Won't raise my voice and won't run away.

NAT TURNER: Stand here.

(The little man comes closer, as *Nat Turner* indicates with his club. *Nat* scrutinizes him.)

NAT TURNER: White man.

PEDDLER: Puzzled?

NAT TURNER: There's a reward.

PEDDLER: A hundred dollars.

NAT TURNER: Never knowed a white man to let go a hundred dollars.

PEDDLER: Could of had it five minutes ago. They was hunting for you.

NAT TURNER: Well?

PEDDLER: You do me a favor. I do you one.

NAT TURNER: What favor?

PEDDLER: Saved me a tar and feathering.

NAT TURNER: How?

PEDDLER: They told me that Turner was smart. Nat Turner even reads, they said.

NAT TURNER (Putting two and two together; lifting the newspaper again to look at it): What that mean—*The Liberator?*

PEDDLER: Liberate means to free.

NAT TURNER: Free who?

PEDDLER: The slaves.

NAT TURNER: White man free slaves?

PEDDLER: His name is Garrison—William Lloyd Garrison.

NAT TURNER: Just one.

PEDDLER: No. More. Not many, but they're growing.

NAT TURNER: What for?

PEDDLER: What for? Because — because somebody once said "Liberty—

Fraternity—Equality." And some people like the sound of those words.

NAT TURNER: Liberty, fraternity, equality.

(He thinks about them. Then—)

Don't need no white man to give me liberty.

PEDDLER: No. Nat Turner's big and powerful. Smart, like they said. Prophet Nat, the slaves call him. He *takes* his liberty. Big shiny horse flings the bit from his mouth, and whoo! there he goes!

NAT TURNER: Ain't nobody catch him yet.

PEDDLER: But what about Stasia, his wife?

NAT TURNER: I'll buy her free.

PEDDLER: And Redic, his boy?

NAT TURNER: Buy him too.

PEDDLER: If Salathiel Francis don't sell him first.

NAT TURNER: Sell him?

PEDDLER: To a slave trader in New Orleans.

NAT TURNER: He won't do that.

PEDDLER: He's mad, boiling mad because you run away.

NAT TURNER: Boy just turn seven need his mammy.

PEDDLER: A bad nigger, Nat Turner. He don't like his chains. Ain't satisfied hoeing tobacco all day, eating hoecake and grits, sleeping alone all night. Nat Turner wants to be free. Well, more than one way to tame a bad nigger, Marse Francis says.

NAT TURNER (Seizing him by the throat): You little hump-backed snake.

PEDDLER: That's what your white master said.

NAT TURNER: Only this ain't no puny white man with his hand on your throat.

PEDDLER: Your master had a gun.

NAT TURNER: *My* master — no! Don't hear no bit clanging in my mouth.

PEDDLER: Don't I?

NAT TURNER: I'm free.

PEDDLER: Are you?

NAT TURNER: *Your* master—that's what you mean. Ain't *every* slave got a black skin? They send you here, ain't they now? Serpent in the garden of Eden.

(Suddenly pulls up the little man so they are fiercely face to face.) Ho! Can't catch that nigger chasing him. So we'll send a snake to fetch him—just a little snake: a sweet-talking little hump-back snake. "See my apple? My perdy little apple? Won't you eat from my apple?"

PEDDLER: You got a hump too, Nat Turner.

NAT TURNER: How much they pay you for it, snake?

PEDDLER: Your hump's worse than mine, Nat Turner.

NAT TURNER: And the Lord said unto the serpent: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat, all the days of thy life; and the seed of man will bruise thy head upon the rock. . . ."

(*Nat Turner* lifts a big black fist to smash the little man's head. The *Peddler* looks at him steadily, says quietly.)

PEDDLER: You got a hump in your soul, Nat Turner.

NAT TURNER (Startled): In my soul?

PEDDLER: Wake up in the morning and the sun is bitter in your mouth.

NAT TURNER: No more it ain't.

PEDDLER: Every beast can lay with its kind: hog with sow, dog with bitch: but Nat Turner—Nat Turner, a man, made in the image of God—he can't!

NAT TURNER: In the image of God.

PEDDLER: He's got to go to Marse Travis, with his hat in his hand, and say:

NAT TURNER (Letting the *Peddler* go; meekly): Please, Marse, Joseph, can I go down the road to Salathiel Francis' and lay with my woman?

PEDDLER: And Salathiel Francis, he laughs and says: "Saturday, all right. Here comes Nat Turner, tearing cross the field to stud his wench. . . . Wait a minute, buck. Where's your pass?"

NAT TURNER: My pass?

PEDDLER: "Remember, only good till 10 o'clock. Then I'll sic patrollers on you. . . . Good stud, Nat Turner, but bad nigger. If I owned him, 'stead of my brother-in-law, I'd clip his claws."

NAT TURNER: "I know how to handle niggers."

PEDDLER: Some day I'd like to meet a nigger even Salathiel Francis can't handle.

NAT TURNER: Nigger that ain't afraid.

PEDDLER: Some say there ain't none.

NAT TURNER: Nobody in the Cross Keyes country tell how Nat Turner go to Salathiel Francis and say: "Overseer fooling with my woman. Call your dog off or I'll brain him."

PEDDLER: Nat Turner thinks he can stop being a black man by running away.

NAT TURNER: Even a lion run for freedom.

PEDDLER: Once there was a slave who could run but didn't.

NAT TURNER: Fool, that slave.

PEDDLER: Instead, he called all the blacks together and he said to them: "Brothers and friends! I will avenge your wrongs. Liberty and justice shall reign. Come and unite with us, brothers."

NAT TURNER: And they kill him.

PEDDLER: They sent soldiers and generals, muskets and cannons. But he was a fox by day and a lion by night. He fell on them in the mountains. He consumed them with fire and sword.

NAT TURNER: And he free them blacks?

PEDDLER: Free as the skies.

NAT TURNER: Musta been some far-off country.

PEDDLER: His name was Toussaint L'Ouverture.

NAT TURNER: Hmn. Guinea nigger. In Virginia they string him up.

PEDDLER: Maybe so. But even in Virginia he'd be a streak of lightning through the swamp. And when he died, people'd say: "Yes, they killed him. But he was right. What he said was true. What he done was brave." And all of a sudden, whole armies are marching.

NAT TURNER: Because one nigger ain't got rabbit in his blood.

(A pause.)

PEDDLER: Fireflies.

NAT TURNER: Night coming.

PEDDLER: Fanny will think I got lost.

NAT TURNER: Got to get to Norfolk by morning. Boats for hiding in Norfolk.

PEDDLER: Mr. Garrison will help

you in Boston. You'll find him in Merchants Hall.
NAT TURNER: Goodbye, little snake.
PEDDLER: Goodbye, turn-tail lion.
NAT TURNER: That wasn't no apple, Mr. Snake.
PEDDLER (Starts off): I ain't got no apples. But I got
(Chants, moving away.) . . . Bibles,
I got bonnets,
I got sugar, I got shoes . . .
NAT TURNER (More to himself, as he watches): You give me a thorn to eat, little snake.

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

The stoop of Stasia's cabin in Salathiel Francis' plantation.

Night. In the background, banjo strumming, singing, laughter, now and then a gay shout.

Stasia sits alone on the highest step. A big, stringy Negro enters.

HIGHGRASS (Studies her a moment): Reckon I knows womans. But never seen one like you.
STASIA (Barely turning her head): Highgrass?
HIGHGRASS: Twice you send Peachy down. "Fetch Highgrass. Got to see him. Tell Highgrass come quick."
STASIA: Got to see you.
HIGHGRASS: All you can see you're looking at.
STASIA: It's impo'tant.
HIGHGRASS: So's Saturday night impo'tant. Can see you any day. Can't see Saturday night more'n once a week.
STASIA: Come on the stoop.
HIGHGRASS (Brash, but puzzled, he takes a few steps): Don't set there like a frog waiting for a fly. What's on your mind?
STASIA: I need a wagon, Highgrass.
HIGHGRASS (On the lowest step, cautious): You hear from Nat?
STASIA: Ain't hear nothing.
HIGHGRASS: If you ain't hear, reckon he's up north or in hell by now.
STASIA: Reckon so.
HIGHGRASS: Then what you need a wagon for?
STASIA: I need a wagon.
HIGHGRASS: Didn't I tell you Wednesday night I couldn't fetch no wagon? Now you call me out the peanut boiling to ask again. Where I get a wagon?
STASIA: From Wagoner Sam—where you get it for Naomi.
HIGHGRASS: When Naomi send for Highgrass, she don't want no wagon, sister.
STASIA: All I want's a wagon.
HIGHGRASS: Going somewhere?
STASIA: Maybe.
HIGHGRASS: Alone?
STASIA: Maybe.
HIGHGRASS (A pause. He moves closer): You'd be a right perdy gal, take that pucker out your face.
STASIA: Face suits me, pucker and all.
HIGHGRASS (Closer): That Nat, he never come back. Runaway nigger, if he know what's good for 'im, *stay* runaway.
(A pause.) Sister, I feel sorry for you.
STASIA: Save it for Naomi.
HIGHGRASS (Still closer): Nice big honey-ball like you, all ripe and juicy

on the bottom—um-*umn!* Ain't good setting there alone, spoiling in the sun.
STASIA: You got a cabin full of honey-balls.

(Banjo-playing, shouts and singing from below. *Highgrass* sits down beside her. He talks softly.)

HIGHGRASS: Hear that? Peachy! Ain't nobody can make that banjo talk like little Peachy. Umnnn! Dust around, you big-foot boys!

(He leans toward her.) They dancing, sugar. They singing, honey-ball. They rubbing bellies—holding tight.

(He leans so hard against her, she has to lean back.) I treat you good. I give what make you dream sweet and peaceful.
STASIA (Slowly, without rising, disengages herself): All I want from you's a wagon.

(*Willie Witcher,* a wizened little old Negro, with a long skinny neck, has entered a moment before, but now steps forward. He wears a purple livery.)

WILLIE WITCHER: Shame, Highgrass, shame!
HIGHGRASS: Shoo, Willie Witcher, shoo!
WILLIE WITCHER: The Lord say: Covet not thy neighbour's ass, nor his ox, nor his woman.
HIGHGRASS: You spout Bible like a pump with a squeak. . . . I'm Nat Turner's friend.
WILLIE WITCHER: You call that a friend? Shame, shame!
HIGHGRASS: Doing Nat a favor.
WILLIE WITCHER: You call that a favor? Shame, shame!
HIGHGRASS: Nigger leave his woman, he want somebody to look after her.
WILLIE WITCHER: Take care, Highgrass! Lord going to turn you in a pillar of salt.
HIGHGRASS: Take care, Willie Witcher! Turkey going to gobble you up for a hornworm.
WILLIE WITCHER: That ain't no way to talk to Marse Francis' personal valet.
HIGHGRASS: Ain't no way to spy on his lead hoe man.
WILLIE WITCHER: Field hand!
HIGHGRASS: Handkerchief head!
WILLIE WITCHER: Not that I going to do it: but if I was to tell Marse Francis he'd have you whipped.
HIGHGRASS: Oh, go long, half-price nigger. You wouldn't fetch fifty dollars. I'm worth eight hundred.
WILLIE WITCHER (Looking past him with eyes wide, mouth open): Lord of mercy!
STASIA (Rising): Nat!

(*Nat Turner* walks out of the shadow toward the stoop. He stops and stands silently before it. *Highgrass* steps quickly down toward where the music comes from. There he stands watch.) Why you do this, Nat?
HIGHGRASS: Get in that cabin, man.
NAT TURNER: Tired. Lord, I'm so tired.

(He sits down on the steps. His head and hands droop.)

STASIA: Mustn't set there, Nat.
NAT TURNER: Can't fight it. Can't fight it no more.
WILLIE WITCHER (Almost hysterical with fear): Oh, sweet lamb of God, forgive me. Forgive me, Jesus.
HIGHGRASS: Hush that cackle.
STASIA: Go 'way, Highgrass.

HIGHGRASS: Coming back with the wagon. Hear that, Nat?

(No answer.) Corn wagon for to take you to the river.

(No answer. He takes *Willie Witcher* along by the waistcoat.) Come along, old shrivel-nut. Tell Mr. Personal Valet only Bible Highgrass know is: "Let not thy tongue speak what thy eye see."

(They leave.)

STASIA: Come inside.

(She goes to the door.)

NAT: Air smell sweet here.

(Listens to the music.) Singing and dancing. Singing like the children of Israel in Egypt. . . . Where Redic?

STASIA: I take him to Granny.

NAT: You lying to me, Stasia.

STASIA: You seen him last night.

NAT: Why you take him there? Afraid? . . . Afraid they sell him?

STASIA: Why ain't you run away, Nat? Last three nights you come and lay on your belly, listening . . . all night, listening. What you listening for, Nat?

NAT: God in the burning bush.

STASIA: That dismal swamp, it turn your head. Full of snakes on trees and hootowls.

NAT: Snake I seen wasn't on tree.

STASIA: You're studying for something. Something dangerous. I can tell by the way you roll all night. The way your heart beat on the bed. What you studying, Nat?

NAT: To eat thorns so they don't stick in the craw.

STASIA: I'm your woman, Nat. You got to tell me.

NAT: Big word, got to. Got to for slaves. Nat Turner's free now. . . . Free with a hump in his soul.

STASIA: Never should have jumped the stick with you. Granny, she warn me. Wild nigger, that Nat, Granny say. He don't make no more man for a woman than a eagle.

NAT: Or a turn-tail lion.

STASIA: Your mammy, she wild, too. Try to kill herself when you was born.

NAT: They tie her hands down to hold her back.

STASIA: Shoulda got me somebody that live big, like Highgrass.

NAT: Ain't too late, Stasia.

STASIA: Somebody from my plantation, to sit by my side when I come home from the field with the sweat running down my feet. You don't care for nobody, you.

NAT: You ain't mine.

STASIA: Don't care for me. Don't care for Redic.

NAT: Redic ain't mine. You and Redic just five hundred dollars to Salathiel Francis.

STASIA: Every night for two weeks I go in swamp—alone with fox bark and snake rustle and owl screech—to bring you food. Scared patroller catch me. Scared Marse Francis' whip. And you don't even eat that food.

NAT: Hush, woman. I'm tired, I tell you.

STASIA: Now you set there where everybody see you. Where they catch you and beat you and lock you up.

NAT: Leave me alone.

STASIA: Ain't you got no sense, Nat Turner? Why you set there like a moon calf, mumbling about snakes and thorns!

NAT (Shouting): Get inside. Leave me alone.

(A pause.)

STASIA (Softly): Oh, Nat, why don't you go in swamp and run away? Five hundred dollar is a world of money. But you smart, you get it. I don't want to belong to Salathiel Francis. Don't want Highgrass. I want you.
NAT: Get lost in swamp.
STASIA: You don't get lost, not you. Know every fen and bog, every trail and hummock. For month you draw map and make plan. You going to run away. You going to buy me and Redic. Now you come back. Something happen to you, Nat. I got right to know. Nat, what happen?
HIGHGRASS (Coming from behind the cabin): Wagon ready.
STASIA: Where?
HIGHGRASS: Behind the spring house.
STASIA: Got sacks?
HIGHGRASS: Wagon full of cornhusks. Coming, Nat?
STASIA: Sure, he coming.

(A pause. *Nat* is torn, cannot move.)

NAT: Touch of swamp fever. Help me.

(They move as if to lift him, on either side, by the arms. *Nat* waves them away.)

NAT: No.
(He rises.) I'm coming.
STASIA: Goodbye, Nat.
NAT: I'll get that money, Stasia.
STASIA: I'll be waiting for it, husband.

(She puts her hand on his arm.)

(White men's voices come from behind the cabin.)

HIGHGRASS: Marse Francis!
STASIA: Inside!

(No sooner has *Nat* gone inside the cabin, than *Salathiel Francis* and *Joseph Travis* appear. *Stasia* leans against the cabin door. *Highgrass* stands on the steps.)

SALATHIEL (Peering): Highgrass?
HIGHGRASS: Yassuh, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: What's that wagon doing down by the springhouse?
HIGHGRASS: You mean that little wagon full of cornhusks Peachy watching?
SALATHIEL: You know what wagon I mean.
HIGHGRASS: I told Peachy what that wagon for.
SALATHIEL: Peachy said he didn't know.
HIGHGRASS: Oh, that little jelly bean, he plumb forget everything. Got no more sense than a chigger. All he ever do is pick a banjo.
SALATHIEL: What's the wagon for?
HIGHGRASS: Why, missie say she want some watermelon put in the springhouse, so they be nice and cold by morning.
SALATHIEL: Going to whip you if you're lying.
HIGHGRASS: Cross my heart and die if I'm lying.
SALATHIEL: And keep off this wench. You hear?
HIGHGRASS: No harm saying: "Nice evening, sister."
SALATHIEL: Your saying "Nice evening, sister," has a way of winding up with the midwife. When I want more studding, I'll let you know. Get that wagon back. Take that team to the horse lot.

HIGHGRASS: Yassuh, Marse Francis, yas*suh*. Got to unload them corn husks in the hog pen first.

(He starts off.)

SALATHIEL: Send Jim Press up here.

HIGHGRASS: Yassuh.

(Off, singing noisily.) Going down to the hog pen,
I got to go-o-o
To that ho-o-og pen. . . .

(*Salathiel,* as if *Stasia* did not exist, brushes past her into the doorway of the cabin.)

SALATHIEL: Got a light?

JOSEPH: No.

SALATHIEL: Must have been a month since Jim Press inspected these cabins. Some don't even bank fires at night.

(He comes out, looks *Stasia* over steadfastly.) Why'd you send Redic away?

STASIA: I ask overseer if I could take him to his Granny.

SALATHIEL: Before you take him anywhere, you ask me.

(He turns and calls.) Hey, Peachy! Peachy Cash! Come here!

(The music, recently started, breaks off again. *Salathiel* writes on a pad.) Well, can't you hurry?

PEACHY: I'm coming, Marse Francis.

(He appears, a timid gawky boy of eighteen, who keeps a respectful distance.) Yassuh.

SALATHIEL: Go over to Levi Waller's place and get Redic from Aunt Florida. Here's your pass for the patrollers.

PEACHY: Yassuh.

(But he does not move.)

STASIA: What you going to do with him, Marse Francis?

SALATHIEL: That's my business.

(To *Peachy.*) Well?

PEACHY: You want I should go now?

STASIA: You wouldn't sell him, would you, Marse Francis?

SALATHIEL (To *Peachy*): When you think? Next week?

PEACHY: You want I should go to—Marse Levi Waller's and—and bring back Aunt Florida?

SALATHIEL: No, you blockhead! Bring back Redic. From Aunt Florida's cabin.

PEACHY: Yassuh.

(He still hesitates.) Please, Marse Francis, could I get a lantern?

SALATHIEL: For a two mile walk across a 'bacco field?

PEACHY: Dark night, Marse Francis.

SALATHIEL: What are you afraid of?

PEACHY: Please, Marse Francis, I don't like the dark.

JOSEPH TRAVIS: Why don't you give him a lantern?

SALATHIEL: All right. Ask Wagoner Sam in the carriage house.

(*Peachy* goes silently.) Let me handle my niggers.

JOSEPH TRAVIS: You're too rough.

SALATHIEL: That's why I got a hundred and you got six. Also, none of mine run away.

STASIA: Please, Marse Joseph, you don't let him sell Redic 'cause Nat run away?

JOSEPH: Not if you tell us where Nat went.

STASIA: I don't know, Marse Joseph. Honest, I don't know.

JOSEPH: Heard from him, haven't you?

STASIA: Not a word, I ain't.

JOSEPH: Understand he's going up north to buy you and Redic free.
STASIA: Never said a word, Marse Joseph. Just up and go.
JOSEPH: But you must have had suspicions. Must have noticed something.
STASIA: Never notice. You know Nat. Ain't like other folks. Never talk. Never show what going on inside. Not even with me, woman what jump the stick with him. He made that way.
SALATHIEL: Well, I'm warning you now, I won't sell you. Not to Nat. Send you down to Georgia first, where you'll wear your life away.
JOSEPH (Annoyed, trying to repair the damage): Stasia, did Nat ever complain I treat him hard?
STASIA: No, Marse Joseph. He ain't.
JOSEPH: I always gave Nat special privileges. Made him kind of overseer, let him come and go, let him read. Even though it's against the law, I let him read.
STASIA: That's right, Marse Joseph.

(*Salathiel* snorts.)

JOSEPH: I'm supposed to be easy on my niggers. Too easy, some people think. Not that I deserve credit for it. Reckon I'm made that way, too. Bad business man.
STASIA: Everybody in the Cross Keyes country know that, Marse Joseph.

(*Salathiel* snorts again.)

JOSEPH: Nat can't escape, Stasia. Even if he gets up north, he'll be a hunted man all his life. There are laws up north that will catch him and send him back. And most runaways don't get that far. They're killed or sold by traders to masters a lot worse than me.
STASIA: I don't know where Nat go, Marse Joseph. So help me, I don't know.

(A pause. *Joseph* shakes his head. He is stumped. *Jim Press* comes.)

JIM PRESS: You sent for me, Mr. Francis?
SALATHIEL: When Peachy comes with Redic, bring him to me.
JIM PRESS: Yes, sir.

(He starts to go.)

SALATHIEL: Stay here.
(Turning to *Stasia.*) Willie Witcher tells me you've been stealing eggs from the hen house.
STASIA: Stealing eggs?
SALATHIEL: You were always one nigger that didn't steal. Who you giving those eggs to?
STASIA: Didn't steal no eggs.
SALATHIEL: Listen. Nat Turner was my sister's slave before she married Mr. Joseph Travis. That's why I consider it my duty to get him back for her. He's her property—a thousand dollars worth. And I'll get him back. You can't fool me the way you fool some others. Now where you taking those eggs?
STASIA: All right. I taking 'em to Granny. Granny old. She sick.
SALATHIEL: You know what the punishment for stealing is.
STASIA: All right. Whip me. I don't mind.

(A pause.)

SALATHIEL (Quietly): All right. You asked for it.
JOSEPH: Salathiel!
SALATHIEL (To *Jim Press*): Give me that crop.

JOSEPH: Salathiel, don't be a fool!

(*Salathiel* comes down and takes *Jim Press's* crop.)

SALATHIEL: Your riding gloves.

(He takes them from *Jim Press* and draws them on.)

JOSEPH: I'm going home. Good night.

(He turns on his heel and starts to go.)

NAT TURNER (From the cabin doorway): No need a-going, Marse Joseph.

(A stunned silence. All turn and stare at him.)

NAT: He ain't going to whip her.

(With a snort, *Salathiel* leaps on the porch, crop gripped tight in gloved hand.)

(Steadfastly) Ain't going to whip me, neither.
SALATHIEL: Ain't I!
NAT: No. You ain't my master. Got no right to whip me.
SALATHIEL: Oh. You're laying down the laws now.
NAT: When the first shall be last and the last shall be first, I lay down lots of laws.
SALATHIEL: When you and me are both in hell, we'll talk about that.
NAT: Maybe 'fore then, Marse Francis.

(*Salathiel* whips the crop across his face. *Nat* does not flinch. *Joseph* leaps up on the stoop, snatches the crop from *Salathiel's* gloved hand.)

JOSEPH: He's my nigger. If there's any whipping to do, I'll do it.

SALATHIEL: Then do it.

(They glare at one another.)

STASIA: Fool, you! Why didn't you let 'em whip me?
NAT: Can't fight it, Stasia. Just can't fight it no more.
JOSEPH: Get your gun, Jim. Help me take him home.
NAT: Don't need no gun, Marse Joseph. I'm going. . . .

(He starts off. *Joseph Travis* and *Jim Press* follow.)

NAT: . . . I'm going home. But I feel sorry for you.

SLOW CURTAIN AS THEY LEAVE

ACT ONE

SCENE 3

Stasia's cabin stoop, as in Scene 2. It is high noon.

Peachy comes up with a manure fork.

Stasia comes to the door, looks about cautiously.

STASIA: St! Hey, you Peachy!
PEACHY: Can't stop now, woman.
STASIA: Pretend you working.
PEACHY: Ain't no work for me to do here.
STASIA: You yard boy, ain't you?
(She snatches some torn tobacco leaves from inside and throws them at his feet.) Rake up them lugs.

(With an annoyed look at her, *Peachy* obeys. *Stasia* brings out a basin of water, turns half away from him, busies herself at washing her feet.)

STASIA (Low): You seen him?
PEACHY: Maybe.
STASIA: Where?

PEACHY: Tobacco house.
STASIA: Alive?
PEACHY: He breathing.
STASIA: Say something?
PEACHY: I got to clean up the barnyard.
STASIA: What he say?
PEACHY: Marse Francis catch me dawdling, he whip.
STASIA: What he say, Peachy!
PEACHY (After a struggle): He want to see Wagoner Sam and Highgrass.
STASIA: What for?
PEACHY: Never say.
STASIA: He say more than that.
PEACHY (Another struggle): Made me prick my arm till the blood come and swear I never tell.
STASIA: Done told, ain't you?
PEACHY (Horrified, dropping the fork): Didn't mean it! Oh, Lord, no! I ain't said nothing.
STASIA: Don't hurt, telling me. But you better keep your gab shut with Willie Witcher.
PEACHY: Sure it don't hurt?
STASIA: Jump the stick with him, didn't I? That make us one. Bring them lugs here.
(When he does, she catches his arm.) Now what else he say? Quick! Marse Francis coming. I tell him you dawdling.
PEACHY: Say to tell 'em the Lord send a serpent with a message for 'em.
STASIA: Serpent. Nothing about thorns?
PEACHY: Not to me, he ain't. Couldn't talk much. All weak and bleeding. But once, when Marse Francis stripe him, he cry out loud: "I eat that thorn, little snake. I eat it. I eat it now." Then he faint, and Jim Press pour some water over his head and they stripe him some more. Bullwhip take the hide most off him.
STASIA: You don't tell 'em, Peachy.
PEACHY: Don't tell Highgrass and Sam? I promise.
STASIA: Don't tell 'em. You hear me?
PEACHY: But I done swear. If I don't tell, snake suck my blood.
STASIA: All right. You told me and I tell 'em.
PEACHY: You wouldn't fool me, Stasia?
STASIA: Not me.
(Raises her head and listens.) Go 'way. Here come Marse Francis.

(*Peachy* runs out and gets his fork.)

PEACHY: You done promise me, Stasia.
STASIA: Go long quick!

(*Peachy* goes. *Stasia* pours out the water in the basin, sits down and wipes her feet with her skirt. *Salathiel* enters with *Redic.*)

SALATHIEL: Go to your mammy.

(*Stasia* clutches him to her skirt.)

REDIC: Look out, mammy. You hurting my face.
SALATHIEL: You can keep him on one condition.
STASIA: Yassuh, Marse Francis.
NATHANIEL: I don't want Nat to see him or talk to him any more.
STASIA: No sir, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: He's a bad influence. He'll make a bad nigger out of him.
STASIA: You been a good boy, Redic?
REDIC: Marse Francis give me piece of rock candy.
STASIA: You ain't cry for your mammy?

REDIC: Uh-unh. Marse Francis let me shine his red-top boots.
STASIA: Go inside now. Mammy bring you eats.
REDIC: Can I get some rock candy, mammy?
STASIA: Go inside.

(*Redic* goes reluctantly, kicking his toes, looking back.)

STASIA: Thank you, Marse Francis. Thank you.
SALATHIEL: How old are you, Stasia?
STASIA (Thinking): Twenty-four or five, I reckon.
SALATHIEL (Looking her over): Still a good strapping wench. Nice looking, too. Time you had more pickaninnies, ain't it?
STASIA: If the Lord say so, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: Well, maybe we can help the Lord make up his mind. How would you like Highgrass for your man?
STASIA: I got a man.
SALATHIEL: Not like Highgrass—full of life and spirits.
STASIA: I satisfied with my man, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: I'm not.
(A pause.) Highgrass'll be good for you. And you'll help him settle down.
STASIA: Can't have two mans, Marse Francis. Ain't right in the eyes of the Lord.
SALATHIEL: I annul your wedding with Nat, Stasia. You understand that? He can't come on this plantation. You'll never see him again. He's not your man any more.
STASIA: Not my man?
SALATHIEL: You don't want to live alone the rest of your life, do you? Grow shriveled and sour like an old apple tree that can't bear fruit?
STASIA: But Nat always been my man. Ain't never had no other man. I *don't* understand, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: Some people call me a strict master, Stasia. Maybe I am. But I want my slaves to be happy. They work better that way. Now you ain't happy with Nat. You can't be. All the time you're with him, you know he'll come to no good end. I want you to be happy with somebody on my place.
STASIA: Oh, Marse . . . please Marse. . . .
SALATHIEL: That's all. I've thought it over and I've made up my mind. Sunday at vespers you come to the big house and I'll marry you to Highgrass. You'll have a regular book wedding and a barrel of corn for a present. First pickaninny, I'll give you another.
(Leaving.) You can tell Aunt Hannah you want a new cotton dress.

(*Salathiel* is almost gone when he hears someone call: "Salathiel!" He stops, is annoyed to see his brother-in-law coming, obviously hot and angry.)

JOSEPH: Salathiel, you know I never hire out my slaves.
SALATHIEL: Why didn't Alvina say so?
JOSEPH: You knew as well as Alvina.
SALATHIEL (To *Stasia*): You had your dinner?
STASIA: No, sir.
SALATHIEL: Go get it.

(She goes into the cabin.)

JOSEPH: It was a put-up job—the two of you—so you could get him here and beat him.

SALATHIEL: Don't be silly.

JOSEPH: Only you're more to blame than she. You talked her into it.

SALATHIEL: I hired Nat because I needed help to glut my crop. I beat him. . . .

JOSEPH: Because I wouldn't.

SALATHIEL: . . . because he was insolent to my overseer. Can't let a nigger threaten a white man.

JOSEPH: Then tell me about it. He's my slave. I'll punish him.

SALATHIEL: Yes. Like last time.

JOSEPH: Yes or no—that's my privilege.

SALATHIEL: Joseph, be reasonable. You'd gone to Jerusalem to sell your tobacco. Alvina was going to Murfreesborough to attend that camp meeting. A nigger's like a hound. You have to punish him right away, so he knows what for.

JOSEPH: I won't have you venting your spleen on my slaves.

SALATHIEL: All right. Don't get so excited about it. He's still alive. And much improved, believe me.

JOSEPH: Only you know how to handle niggers. Well, you can't handle Nat that way.

SALATHIEL: Let's try it. I'll buy him from you.

JOSEPH: You'll break him.

SALATHIEL: I'll buy him. What do you care?

JOSEPH: He's my best field hand.

SALATHIEL: I've seen him in the field—ploughing furrows head down—nature's philosopher—thinking!

JOSEPH: Let him think. Every furrow's as straight as a rod.

SALATHIEL: I tell you that nigger is dangerous. Sell him to a slave trader.

JOSEPH: Is that why you want to buy him?

SALATHIEL: Every time he comes here, he disorganizes the whole plantation. Has all my niggers whispering and carrying on.

JOSEPH: No slave trader will ever set foot in my house.

SALATHIEL: I've just told Stasia he can't come here any more. She's taking another buck.

JOSEPH: Then I'll buy *her* from *you.*

SALATHIEL: Buy her! With what?

JOSEPH: Salathiel, I don't think I like you.

SALATHIEL: My dear brother-in-law: I dare say we have a mutual regard for one another.

JOSEPH: I think you're a rotter.

SALATHIEL: And I think you're a fool.

JOSEPH: You—and your strong ideas!

SALATHIEL: You and your fine sentiments—a bit shabby at the heels.

(*Jim Press* comes with *Nat* in chains.)

JIM PRESS: He was drawing maps in the dust on the barn floor.

JOSEPH: Take those chains off.

JIM PRESS: When I asked what for he said, "So I can find my way if I go blind."

SALATHIEL: Take the chains off.

(*Jim Press* unlocks the chains.)

SALATHIEL (With a mock bow): All yours.

JOSEPH (To *Nat*): Why'd you threaten Jim Press? You know that's wrong.

NAT: Every time I straighten my back, he give me lick over the head with his gun butt.

JIM PRESS (In answer to *Joseph's* look): Mr. Francis gives the orders. I just obey 'em.

JOSEPH: Mr. Francis says you can't see Stasia any more.

(*Nat's* face is impassive.) Ever. You understand?

NAT: I understand.

(A pause.)

JOSEPH: All right. Come along.

NAT: Can't I say goodbye to her?

JOSEPH (After a slight pause): Ask Mr. Francis.

SALATHIEL (Calling): Stasia!

(*Stasia* comes out from the cabin.)

SALATHIEL: Say goodbye to Nat.

NAT: Can't I be alone a minute?

JOSEPH (After a pause): Ask Mr. Francis.

NAT (Looking at Salathiel, who frowns; then slowly): Please, Marse Francis. . . .

SALATHIEL: How do we know you won't run away?

NAT: I never run away from you again, Marse Joseph. Never lied to you, did I?

JOSEPH (Turning): Come.

(The three white men leave.)

NAT: He going to make you jump stick with Highgrass?

STASIA: Book wedding.

NAT: When?

STASIA: Sunday vespers.

NAT: Where Redic?

STASIA: Sleeping. I wake him for you.

NAT: Let him sleep.

(A pause.)

STASIA: What you want to see Highgrass for?

NAT: You tell him, like you promise Peachy?

STASIA: Highgrass say he can't come.

NAT (Shaking his head, smiling): He come, all right.

STASIA (Frightened): What you going to do, Nat?

NAT: The business of the Lord.

STASIA: Nat! I'm scared. What you going to do?

NAT: Don't be scared, honey. Ain't nothing to be scared about. You going to live long. You going to have a parcel of children. They going to suck from your breast and sing at your knee. Maybe some day them children be free.

STASIA: But you, Nat—

NAT: Me, I'm happy. Load off my mind. Know what I got to do. Can't nobody beat that.

(A horn blows.)

STASIA: Dinner-time over. Got to go back in the field.

NAT: Sleep easy, Stasia.

STASIA: Sleep easy, Nat.

(She leaves slowly. From around the side of the cabin, *Highgrass* sticks his head.)

HIGHGRASS: White folks gone?

NAT: Come here, Highgrass.

HIGHGRASS: Ain't got much time. Overseer done blow his horn.

(But he comes out, brash as usual, though now with a trace of caution in his step.)

NAT: You bring Wagoner Sam?

HIGHGRASS (Nodding): Behind the cabin.

NAT: Come here, Wagoner Sam.

(When nobody comes, *Highgrass* goes to the side of the cabin.)

HIGHGRASS: Sssst!
(Peers around the side.) Coast clear. Come out. . . . Ain't nobody going to hurt you. Come on out.

(Shamefaced *Wagoner Sam* comes out hesitantly, followed by *Peachy*. *Sam* is awed and takes off his hat. Both he and *Peachy* look as if they might, at any moment, turn and run.)

WAGONER SAM: What you call us for, Nat Turner?
NAT: The Lord send me a serpent with a message for you.
HIGHGRASS: What kind of serpent?
NAT: A hump-back serpent. A sweet-talking little hump-back serpent.
HIGHGRASS: What he say?
NAT: He say he want you, Wagoner Sam and Peachy Cash at Cabin Ford Hollow on Sunday vespers.
WAGONER SAM: What for?
NAT: For the Lord's barbecue, say the serpent.

(A pause. The men are awed.)

WAGONER SAM: Can I bring Blacksmith Nelson?
NAT: If you can trust him.
HIGHGRASS: I bring my brother Dred.
PEACHY: Maybe I get Uncle Hark.
NAT: Make them swear as I now swear you!—Draw blood.

(They prick themselves.)

NAT: Put your bloody hand in mine. Now swear!
PEACHY: I done swear once.
NAT: Swear again.

(They put their right hands in his and repeat.)

NAT: May this arm wither . . .
THE THREE: May this arm wither.
NAT: May this tongue rot . . .
THE THREE: May this tongue rot.
NAT: May this heart stop if I speak of this to any man.
THE THREE: May this heart stop if I speak of this to any man.
WAGONER SAM (Profoundly stirred): Amen!
HIGHGRASS: Getting late. Overseer scold. We better go now.

(*Nat* does not answer. They turn awkwardly to go.)

NAT: Highgrass! Sam!
(They halt.) Bring your scythes.
WAGONER SAM: Scythes?
HIGHGRASS: What for?
NAT: The grass is ripe and ready for the cutting.
(*Sam* and *Highgrass* look at one another, startled.) Peachy, you bring your banjo.
PEACHY: We going to sing, Prophet Nat?
NAT: Yes. We going to sing Unto the Lord, for he is a man of war.

(A pause. The overseer blows his horn again, this time far off in the field. *Highgrass* fidgets.)

NAT: Go back to work now.
WAGONER SAM (Putting on his hat): See you Sunday, Prophet Nat.
HIGHGRASS: At the barbecue.
PEACHY: With my little banjo.

(They file off. *Nat* watches them. Then, exultant, he breathes in slowly, raises both arms, fists clenched, to the sky.)

NAT: Who's a turn-tail lion, little snake?

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

Cabin Ford Hollow in the Great Dismal Swamp as in Act I, Scene 1. Again it is dusk.

Wagoner Sam and *Blacksmith Nelson* are sitting, both fairly upright, on tree roots. *Dred* lies on his back chewing grass. *Peachy* sits sprawled on a hummock, playing his banjo and singing.

PEACHY (Singing plaintively):

I want to go to heaven;
Set in the angels' seat,
I want to go to heaven,
Eat what the angels eat.
When I get to heaven,
Going to ease, ease,
Me and my God
Going to do as we please.

DRED (Rising and looking down the trail; he is a younger, frailer edition of *Highgrass*): Sorry-looking barbecue, you ask me.
BLACKSMITH NELSON (A prim little man, no longer young, with a tart school-teacher face): Nobody ask you. Now or last time.
DRED: What I want to know is: what all that swearing in for? Figured I getting front pew in heaven, by the way Highgrass talk. Then I come here and find nothing but a mosquito wake in a swamp.

(He smacks a mosquito on his arm.)

Hoo! Big as a bat.
PEACHY (Singing):
Come on, Moses, don't get lost,
Smite the water and come across.
DRED: Yes. Where *is* this black Moses?
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Where your brother Highgrass?
DRED: Reckon he figured getting married's enough trouble for one day.
WAGONER SAM: Well, now, if Nat ain't come, and Highgrass ain't come, and Hark ain't come, maybe—
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Maybe what?
DRED: Go on. Say it.
WAGONER SAM: —I just thinking—maybe it going to rain again.
DRED: Rain! You mean you want to go home.
PEACHY: Uncle Hark, he say: "Mnn-nn. No barbecue with Nat. Not me. Let sleeping dogs sleep, them's my principles."
BLACKSMITH NELSON (To Wagoner Sam): Yesterday you itch all over: couldn't wait.
WAGONER SAM: Maybe I change my mind.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Can't you change it again?
DRED: Going home's a right smart idea.
WAGONER SAM: Maybe we better all go home. Gloomy out here.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Hour ago you yelling: "When Nat say he come, he come."
WAGONER SAM: Generally do.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Well, when I say I wait, I wait.
DRED: And when I say I go, I go.
NELSON: Go along then. Ain't nobody begging you to stay.
DRED (Coming over to him slowly): Blacksmith Nelson, hear tell you was a preaching man once. That true?
NELSON: Maybe.
DRED: But you preach so mean, everybody stop coming.
NELSON: Some call it mean, some call it honest.
DRED: And when Marse Francis catch you harking on Moses and the children of Israel all the time, he say you can't preach no more. That true, Blacksmith Nelson?
NELSON: Maybe. But I never been horsewhipped for stealing.
PEACHY (Looking off left): Lawd! Look at Highgrass.

(*Highgrass* comes in a new shirt, a new pair of pants, new shoes, all bright.)

NELSON: Highgrass, you look like a Christmas tree.
HIGHGRASS (Glum): Feel like Santy Claus.
DRED: Yellow shoes!
PEACHY (Doing a jig and singing): David, David, a shepherd boy, He kill Goliath and shout for joy!
HIGHGRASS: Hush up.
DRED: Got her all married and salted down, Highgrass?
HIGHGRASS: Can't get married till the white folks come.
DRED: Whoo! *He* going to have white folks at his wedding.
HIGHGRASS: Sure. Lots of 'em. From all over Southampton and Gates county. Only the road is knee-deep in mud and they ain't get here yet.
WAGONER SAM: Look like it going to rain some more.
HIGHGRASS: Can't see no use in all this getting married. I done my manhood duty by Marse Francis. Give him five pickaninny already. What more he want?
BLACKSMITH NELSON: He say high time you settle down.
HIGHGRASS: Settle down! I can't settle down no more than dust on a turnpike.
WAGONER SAM: You seen Prophet Nat?
HIGHGRASS: Nat in stocks.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: In stocks!
HIGHGRASS: What's the matter? You deef?
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Talk up, Highgrass. You got more to tell than that.
HIGHGRASS: Seems Nat wouldn't come to mess and eat. That make Marse Joseph so puffing mad, he nearly pop open. "Going to get stern with you now, Nat Turner," he say. "I been fool long enough. In the stocks you go."
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Poor man.
DRED: Poor barbecue.
PEACHY: Ain't no use waiting now.
WAGONER SAM: Going to rain, sure enough.
BLACKSMITH NELSON (Rising): Well . . .
WAGONER SAM: Home.

(*Highgrass* takes a parcel from one pocket, a flask from another.)

DRED: What you got there, Highgrass?
PEACHY: Umn-mnn! Pig!

DRED: Applejack!

HIGHGRASS: He say barbecue, ain't he?

PEACHY: Where you get it, Highgrass?

HIGHGRASS: Beg it from Marse Joseph. Where you think?

DRED (Licking his lips, reaching for the flask): Give it here.

HIGHGRASS (Snatching it away from him): Tuck your tail in a minute, will you?

(He drinks long, while the others watch him; then smacks his lips with terrific gusto.) Umnn! Ain't no better applejack this side of Dohemey.

DRED (Greedy): Give it here.

HIGHGRASS (With a scornful look at him): Drink, Peachy?

(*Peachy* drinks. He is nervous, he doesn't like it, but he has to be a man, so he drinks deep.)

WAGONER SAM: Easy, boy, easy.

DRED (Frantic): Give it here.

HIGHGRASS (Taking the flask from Peachy; to Dred): How you like I smack you down?

DRED: Call that a brother?

HIGHGRASS: You been a fine brother, ain't you? . . . First woman I ever get, he steal her from me.

(He drinks.)

BLACKSMITH NELSON: You better crawl out that bottle and hurry back to your wedding.

HIGHGRASS (Feeling high): Don't do no good to hurry, Blacksmith Nelson, cause you liable to run by more'n you can overtake.

(Offers him the flask.) Why don't you pull that sour bung out your face and pour in some sweet drink?

BLACKSMITH NELSON: No, thank you.

HIGHGRASS: You act so holy, make me feel I ought to take off my shoes. Sing something, Peachy. He say, barbecue, ain't he?

(*Peachy* tunes his banjo.)

WAGONER SAM (To Blacksmith Nelson): Let's go home.

HIGHGRASS (Expansive): You know, if I made a practice of marrying, I'd sooner marry Naomi. Some gal, Naomi! She's a doctoring woman and a sworn midwife.

PEACHY (Playing and singing):
If I had gills, I could swim, swim,
If I had gills, I could swim,
I'd swim down the river and out to the sea,
Goodbye little puddle, you'll never see me,
If I had gills, I could swim.

WAGONER SAM: You coming?

BLACKSMITH NELSON (Yielding mournfully): Come on.

(They start slowly across the stage.)

PEACHY:
If I had a quarter, I could buy, buy,
If I had a quarter, I could buy,
I'd buy me a saddle, I'd buy me a mare,
I'd ride to Atlanta and look at the Fair,
If I had a quarter. . . .

HIGHGRASS (Seeing that Dred has lifted the bottle and drunk it nearly empty): Told you hands off, ain't I?

(He hurls himself on *Dred*. They grunt, grapple, fall, roll on the ground. *Peachy* scrambles out of the way.)

WAGONER SAM (Far to the left, looking off): What's that?
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Somebody coming.
WAGONER SAM: It's Prophet Nat. Prophet Nat coming.

(He comes back quickly: to the fighting brothers.) Get up. Ain't you shamed? Prophet Nat coming.

HIGHGRASS (Engrossed in the fight): Don't get the rest. Oh, no, you don't. Come here, baby.
(Wrenches the bottle away.) Ha! Low-down thief.

(Wipes the top off with his sleeve, purses his mouth to drink. With the bottle poised, he becomes aware of *Nat* standing over him. His eyes drop, he tosses the bottle away and slowly gets up.)

NAT: Peachy, stand on that hummock. Anybody come, you sing.
PEACHY (Obeying): Sing what?
NAT: "Daniel."

(*Peachy* starts strumming it.)

NAT: Not now.
WAGONER SAM: Highgrass say you in stocks.
NAT: Marse Joseph let me go.

(He turns to *Blacksmith Nelson*.)

You Blacksmith Nelson.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Yes.
NAT (After studying him sharply a moment): You welcome, Blacksmith Nelson.

(He turns and sharply studies *Dred*.)

Who that?
HIGHGRASS: That's my brother Dred.
NAT (Still studying *Dred;* after a pause): Everybody here make sure he want to stay. 'Cause once you start traveling down this road, there ain't no turning back.
DRED: What road?
NAT: Road to freedom.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: How you get there?
NAT: Fight for it.
WAGONER SAM: Fight for it!
HIGHGRASS: With what?
NAT: You bring your scythes?

(A stunned silence. Then consternation.)

HIGHGRASS: You mean you going to fight the whole United States?
WAGONER SAM: Us six?
DRED: What is this, Highgrass? You say barbecue. He talk about a rising.
NAT: Not six. *All* the blacks.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: They hang Denmark Vesey for it.
NAT: They don't hang Toussaint L'Ouverture.
DRED: That nigger going to kill us.
NAT: Lie! Lie! Going to free us.
DRED: Don't listen to him. Run, I tell you, run!

(The men look at one another in confusion. For a moment it looks as if they might turn and flee. Just then *Peachy* strikes his banjo. At first faltering and faint, his song grows slowly louder and firmer.)

PEACHY:
Daniel, can't you find a rock to hide,
A rock to hide, a rock to hide. . . .
NAT: Who is it?

PEACHY (Craning but strumming): Jim Press.
HIGHGRASS: Coming after me.
NAT: Hide in the bushes.

(*Highgrass* disappears right.)

PEACHY: Oh, Daniel, can't you find a rock to hide.
When that lion come.
NAT: Sit down.

(He throws himself full length on the ground, picks a blade of grass to chew. The others, excepting defiant *Dred*, sit down stiffly.)

NAT: Look easy.

(All, excepting *Dred*, try.)

(Loud and cheerful, while *Peachy* strums.) "Sideswipe that wagon in Jim Press's fence and let out his pig," he say. "That'll learn him to steal my cotton."

(Jim Press enters, approaches slowly. All pretend not to see him.) "And next year, he going to raise only yellow cotton, like niggers. Providing I let him raise any at all."
JIM PRESS: Where's Highgrass?
NAT (Surprised): Oh. Good evening, Marse Overseer. Good evening.

(*Peachy* stops playing.)

JIM PRESS: Mr. Travis said he was going to a barbecue with Peachy.
NAT: If he coming, he ain't come yet.
JIM PRESS (To *Peachy*): Mr. Francis wants you at the big house.
PEACHY: Me at the big house?
JIM PRESS: He's giving a party. He wants you to sing.
PEACHY: I can't sing at no party.
JIM PRESS: Come on.
PEACHY: My banjo bust a string.
JIM PRESS: All right. We'll get you another.

(To *Nat*.) If you see Highgrass, he better come home.

(Starts to go, hesitates, then yields to impulse.) Who said I'm stealing his cotton?
NAT: You stealing somebody's cotton?
JIM PRESS: Was it Mr. Francis?
NAT: Ain't right for nigger to talk against white folks, Marse Overseer. You know that.
JIM PRESS: It's a lie.
NAT: Yassuh.
JIM PRESS: Now he's going to break down my fence and let out my pig.
NAT: Your pig?
JIM PRESS: Ain't that what you heard?
NAT: What I hear? I ain't hear nothing.
JIM PRESS (With slow-mounting fury): He thinks he's doing me a favor, letting me put in a half-acre of cotton and raise a pig. I used to have thirty acres of my own.
NAT: Thirty acre!
JIM PRESS: Yes. And he squeezed me out. Them kind ought to be shot.
NAT: Them kind's what gets along. He got a hundred slave. Marse Joseph got only six.
JIM PRESS: And he'll squeeze out Travis, too. You watch. Just like he squeezed out me and Simon Lacey and Calhoun Bell. Ain't satisfied with what he's got. He wants to swallow the world.
NAT: Mighty big bite, the world.
JIM PRESS: Damn him, anyway! I'll go to Texas and get me some new land.

To hell with him and his overseer job! Let him drive his own niggers.

(He stands a moment in impotent rage. Then—) Come on, Peachy.

(But before going, to *Nat.*) Ain't got no hard feelings against you, Nat Turner. I want you to know that.

(He and *Peachy* go silently. As soon as he is well gone, *Nat* leaps to his feet.)

NAT: Getting dark. Got to move fast. Sst! Highgrass.

DRED: Move! You going to move right in the grave.

WAGONER SAM: That's right, Nat.

HIGHGRASS (Coming out of the bushes): We can't fight no battle 'gainst the white folks.

NAT: Won't be no battle. Strike like lightning in the dark. Hide in the swamp by day. Nobody know where we strike next.

WAGONER SAM: But we all alone.

NAT: Got God with us, ain't we? Sent a serpent to us, ain't he?

WAGONER SAM: But just us five and God—

NAT: Get more soon. Lots more. Hundreds. Whole armies. Even white folks.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: You dreaming, man.

DRED: Dreaming! He crazy!

NAT (Pulling a newspaper out of his shirt): Ain't dreaming that, am I? Liberator—means "Free the slaves." White folk do that. They waiting for us. They help us.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Where you get them armies?

NAT (Picking up a stick and drawing a line on the ground. All but *Dred* group around him): See that? Jerusalem turnpike. Here Levi Waller's place. Nobody there now but Levi himself. Woman and children at camp meeting. Here where we strike, around the back.

HIGHGRASS: What that mean, strike?

DRED: Didn't you hear him talk about scythes? He going to kill white folks. Don't you *know* what that mean?

WAGONER SAM: Oh, Lord!

NAT: You don't get freedom by asking for it.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Go on.

NAT: Now we got four horse, two gun, six more in the army.

HIGHGRASS: How six?

NAT: Levi got six slaves, ain't he?

DRED: Bat-crazy, I tell you. Don't listen to him.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Go on.

NAT (Drawing at the map on the ground): Here we go, soft like the fox, through the wood, cross the cornfield, one mile to Putnam Corner. Here Bascomb Vaughn and his two big boys.

WAGONER SAM: Kill them boys, too?

NAT: Nits make lice.

DRED: Lord, that nigger plumb out of his head!

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Go on.

NAT: Got ten horse now, six gun, army of thirty.

(Draws with the stick.) Two mile down Turkey Creek—

HIGHGRASS: Going to pass by Olly Reese?

NAT: Poor white. Got no slave. But here—here Salathiel Francis. Ho, when we leave there—

BLACKSMITH NELSON (Excited): Real army now.

NAT: Guns, bullets, food, hundred

men, vanguard of cavalry. Ready for Jerusalem. Fall on it in the dead of night. Seize the arsenal.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: And the walls come tumbling down.
HIGHGRASS (Excited): Now we got whole county.
NAT: Now we issue the call. "Brothers and friends! We have sworn to be slaves no more. Liberty and justice shall reign. Come and unite with us, brothers!"
BLACKSMITH NELSON: And they come!
NAT: From Carolina, from Atlanta, from Georgia—a million black folks, studying to be free. Will you be there when they come, Blacksmith Nelson?
BLACKSMITH NELSON: All my life I preach freedom. Time I practice some now.
HIGHGRASS: I'll be there, General Nat. Count on me.
DRED (Turning frantically on them): What's the matter? You staying? You lost your mind?
NAT: Your life worth more than theirs, Wagoner Sam?
WAGONER SAM: I know things ain't good. But I ain't got it so bad, either. For thirty years I inch along. Mind flies, first. Next, I water boy. Start plowing when I had to reach up to hold the handles. Then I learn wagoning from old Mingo. I'm Wagoner Sam now. Best wagoner in the county. That's something.
NAT: Would be, if you owned the hands you work with.
HIGHGRASS: Let's go without him.
DRED: Come with me, Sam. I'm going home.
NAT: Then go now.
WAGONER SAM (In utter confusion, turning for help): Blacksmith Nelson. . . .
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Choose for yourself, Sam.
DRED: Save your neck, Sam. Go home.
NAT: Go now, rabbit blood.
DRED: Don't shoo me, Black Moses.
NAT: Go fast, I tell you.
DRED: I'm going, all right.
NAT (Suddenly seizing him with two powerful hands and pulling him close): You open your mouth and I'll kill you. Understand?
DRED (Turning to jelly and gasping as the hands squeeze his windpipe): Sure. . . . Sure, Prophet Nat.

(*Nat* releases him. He pants for air. Then, without a sound, he turns and runs.)

NAT: Anybody else want to go, go now.

(All look at *Wagoner Sam*. After a struggle, he pulls himself together, stands upright. *Blacksmith Nelson* puts an arm on his shoulder.)

NAT: Then we ready.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: All ready, Prophet Nat.
NAT (Leading): Come.

(They file off silently behind him.)

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 2

The stoop of Stasia's cabin, that night. It is raining. There is a light in the cabin.

Naomi enters, her head covered with a shawl against the rain. She is a young woman, high-spirited, voluptuous.

NAOMI: Stasia! Hey, Stasia!
STASIA (Inside): Who there?
NAOMI: Naomi.
STASIA (Opening the door, looking out before answering): What you doing here?
NAOMI: Come with the colonel to help at the party.
(A hostile silence.) Tell me you getting married. . . . Book married.
(No answer.) Now ain't that fancy!
STASIA: What you want from me?
NAOMI: From you I don't want nothing. But Willie Witcher say Marse Francis want you at the big house.
STASIA: Tell him I'm coming.

(She turns to go back in.)

NAOMI: Seen my friend Highgrass?
STASIA: No.
NAOMI: Cause Marse Francis got his white folks waiting. And woman, he sure is hopping mad.
STASIA: Ain't seen him.
NAOMI: That nigger won't be no use to you tonight, sister. Cause when Marse Francis get through with him, he won't be able to sit down, much less lay.

(*Stasia* looks at her coldly, turns, goes back in the cabin and slams the door.)

NAOMI (Leaping on the stoop, pounding furiously at the door, and kicking it open. *Stasia* confronts her in the entry): Hold on a minute, woman. How come you so high and mighty? You just a hoe hand, ain't you?
STASIA: Hush up. You wake my boy.
NAOMI: "Hush up, you wake my boy!" Oh, yes, Sister Stasia, she such a good woman. She wouldn't do nothing bad—oh, no! Not her.
STASIA: What I done to you?
NAOMI: Stole my man.
STASIA: Got one left, ain't you?
NAOMI: I ain't no hypocrite. I speak the truth. One ain't enough to hold me.
STASIA: Get out of here.

(She gives *Naomi* a push and slams the door. *Naomi*, enraged, stands shouting at the closed door.)

NAOMI: I hope you get what's coming to you. 'Cause the Lord knows you ain't getting much in Highgrass. Long lean lily-livered double-crossing tadpole—that's what he is.
WILLIE WITCHER (In livery, from the big house): Sh! Stop that hollering. You 'sturb the white folks.
NAOMI: Run along, deacon. Run along.
WILLIE WITCHER: Hold your tongue, woman. You talking to Marse Francis' personal valet.
NAOMI: And you talking to Colonel Eppes' table gal. Besides being a doctoring woman and a sworn midwife.

(He ignores her, goes to the door and pounds on it with the flat of his hand.)

WILLIE WITCHER: Got your new dress on?
STASIA (Opening the door): This here's good enough.
WILLIE WITCHER: Now you quit your sulking. Marse Francis know what good for you. He raise best tobacco, best horse, best nigger and best sow. Put your new dress on. They waiting for you.
STASIA: Let them wait.

WILLIE WITCHER: Marse Francis say Highgrass make you a better man than Nat Turner.
STASIA: Marse Francis say!
WILLIE WITCHER: Hurry up. Put your new dress on.

(He starts to go.)

NAOMI (To *Willie Witcher*): What's the matter? Don't she want Highgrass?

(But he has been insulted by her, so he walks past her and disappears loftily.)

NAOMI (To *Stasia*): Don't you want to marry Highgrass?

(*Stasia*, who has meanwhile slipped on her new cotton dress, does not answer.)

NAOMI: No nigger to sneeze at, Highgrass ain't. Got some mighty nice tricks.
(She laughs.) Sure know his way round.
STASIA (Sitting on stoop): Wish I could run away.
NAOMI (Sitting beside her): I know how you feel, honey. I used to itch for Little Ben. Want to jump broom with Little Ben. But Marse Colonel, he say, "No. Can't have Little Ben. Get you a big buck nigger to lay with."
(She shakes her head.) Big buck nigger sure open my eye.
(She laughs.) Trouble was, he wouldn't work. Want to lay in bed with me all day. So Marse Colonel sell him to the railroad.
STASIA: If only I could run away.
NAOMI: After that: one man, another man—black, yellow or white—no more difference than two handles on a pump.
STASIA: Why can't I run away?

(Rises with determination.)

NAOMI: Where you going to run to?
STASIA: Up north . . . I don't know . . . to Granny.
NAOMI: Granny—hunh! They be on your hind heel before you bend your front knee.
STASIA: Then I go in the swamp.
NAOMI: You die there.
STASIA: All right, I die there. I don't care. I don't care where I go. Don't care what happen to me. I can't stay here no more. I can't. I won't.

(*Hark* comes limping in, dripping wet, plastered with mud. He is excited and frightened.)

HARK: That you, Stasia? Where Nat?
STASIA: How I know?
HARK: Know about that barbecue, don't you?
STASIA: Don't know nothing.
HARK: Come along, Peach say. But not me—uh-unh! No barbecue with Nat for me. Let sleeping dogs sleep, them's my principles.
NAOMI: What's wrong with a Sunday barbecue?
HARK: Sunday barbecue! That ain't what I seen.
STASIA: Nat ain't run away again?
NAOMI: You run away yourself once.
HARK: Sure. Every slave dream he run away once. But I learn my lesson then. Learn it on this leg. Learn it on every inch of this body. I'm no Prophet Nat. I know how black folks should act.
STASIA: What you seen?
HARK: Marse Levi Waller with his head split open.

STASIA: No!

HARK: And Marse Bascomb Vaughn and his two big boys.

STASIA: Dead? All dead?

HARK: Split down the middle like wood with an ax.

NAOMI: That nigger drunk!

HARK: Wasn't drunk when Marse Francis send me on horse to find Highgrass. Wasn't drunk when I see the house all dark and go inside and stand in a pool of blood.

STASIA: Granny Florida! Where's Granny Florida?

HARK: Gone. Slaves gone. Horses gone. Everybody gone.

NAOMI: Told Marse Francis yet?

HARK: I'm 'fraid. Ain't told nobody. I don't know what to do.

NAOMI: Best thing is keep your mouth shut.

STASIA: Otherwise they blame you.

HARK: Blame me? What I done? I don't even swear like Peachy ask me to.

STASIA: Hush up.

HARK: Lord send Nat a serpent, Peachy say. Lord never say kill white folks.

STASIA (Shaking him): Hush, I tell you.

(She waits till he pulls himself together.) Now you go to big house and ask for Marse Francis.

HARK: What I say?

STASIA: Say: Can't find Highgrass.

HARK: Yes?

STASIA: Say house all dark and nobody home.

HARK: Yes. . . . I could say that.

STASIA: Then say it.

HARK: Yes . . . I say it. . . .

NAOMI: Well, go on.

HARK: I—I say it. . . .

(Still faltering, he limps away.)

NAOMI: You better go to my cabin.

STASIA: I stay here.

NAOMI: Be out of trouble there.

STASIA: Got to stay now.

(She goes inside the door.) Redic! Redic, wake up.

(She disappears a moment.) Get up, I say. Put your clothes on.

REDIC (Inside, sleepy): Why's it so dark, mammy?

STASIA: Come here.

(In the doorway she helps him dress.) You know where Marse Colonel Eppes live?

REDIC: Sure. Turn at the church and first house you see.

STASIA: You go there.

REDIC: What for?

STASIA: Don't ask what for. Go around to the quarters and ask for Naomi's cabin. You stay there. Don't make no light. Just stay there.

REDIC: Alone?

STASIA: Redic ain't afraid!

REDIC: Ain't you coming?

STASIA: Sure. I coming. Maybe little later.

(She takes him by the hand to Naomi.) Say "See you some more" to Aunt Naomi. Mammy don't come right away, she look after you.

REDIC (Sleepy): See you some more, Aunt Naomi.

STASIA (Calling after him, as he leaves): Go through the field, not down the road. Watch out for patrollers.

(As he stops, far right.) What you see?

REDIC: He acting awful funny.

STASIA (Peering out): Ain't nobody but Dred. Drunk again. Come here.
(*Redic* comes.) Go 'round by the smoke house. Quick now.

(She gives him a shove, but he goes slowly, looking fearfully back. *Dred* comes, half naked, wet.)

DRED: They come yet?
STASIA: What you talking about!
DRED: They ain't kill him yet?
NAOMI: Who kill who?
STASIA: You been at that barbecue?
DRED: Nat! He start a rising. He going to kill Marse Francis with a scythe.
STASIA: Fool! What you come here for?
DRED: He seen me with him. Jim Press seen me.
STASIA: Then go and hide.
DRED: I can't stay in that swamp no more. All that water and them snakes.
NAOMI: Stop crying.
STASIA: You going to warn Marse Francis? That what you do?
DRED (Looking at her, suspicious): You his woman, ain't you?
STASIA: You going to warn Marse Francis?
(No answer.) You do that, Nat kill you.
DRED (Slow): Yes. That's what he say.

(A pause. Then he starts to move away.)

STASIA (Stepping in front of him): Mind what I tell you. Don't go to the big house.
NAOMI (Stepping up quietly beside him): You catch your death of cold, honey, all wet and buck naked.
DRED (Looking her over): That make you cry, don't it?
NAOMI (Looking him over now): You Highgrass brother, ain't you?
DRED: Everybody know what you is.
NAOMI: Highgrass got something.
DRED: Yes? Ain't got so much.
NAOMI: Run in the family, don't it?
DRED: You tell Saralee I make you puke.
NAOMI: Maybe, now I look at you, you don't.
DRED: You been laying with Highgrass last six weeks.
NAOMI: Maybe I lay with you, I like you better.

(An electric pause between them.)

NAOMI: Why don't you let me take you inside and dry you off, honey? Won't take but a minute.
(He hesitates. She takes him by the arm, leads him to the cabin.) Heap of fine white folks at that party. Marse Francis get mad you come in all wet and buck naked.

(Before entering and shutting the door, she nods to *Stasia*.)

(*Stasia* watches a moment: the light inside goes out: there is a low laugh. Then *Stasia* starts quickly toward the right. *Nat Turner* and *Highgrass* come down the path.)

STASIA: Just going to look for you.
NAT: White folks all come?
STASIA: All 'cept them you kill.
HIGHGRASS: That Dred! Dred been here!
NAT (Looking at his hands, bitterly): Wasn't used to killing then. . . . Where he go?
STASIA (After a pause): Hiding. Ain't

had chance to talk much. But Hark seen Levi Waller with his head split open.

HIGHGRASS: Hark! He scared to talk.

NAT: Talk, talk! Everybody talk. Time to move now, move fast.

(To *Stasia.*) You go to Cabin Ford Hollow.

STASIA: I stay here.

NAT: Granny Florida there.

STASIA: Stay with you.

NAT: This ain't no woman's business.

STASIA: I got no more woman's feelings.

NAT (Looks at her in surprise; then): Good. Then go to the Big House. Act like nothing happen. Get the key out the gun cabinet.

STASIA: What I tell 'em?

NAT: Tell 'em. . . . Tell 'em Highgrass get lost in swamp. He fell in mudhole. He clean himself now.

HIGHGRASS: Tell 'em he be there soon.

NAT (To *Highgrass*): Go back to the men. When I raise my lantern three times, you gallop up with them on horse and surround the house.

HIGHGRASS: Captain Highgrass obey, General.

NAT: Tell Blacksmith Nelson to follow quick with them on foot.

HIGHGRASS: I give him your orders.

(He goes quickly.)

NAT (To *Stasia*): You ready now?

WILLIE WITCHER (Calling from off left): Stasia! Stasia!

STASIA: Willie Witcher.

NAT: Get rid of him.

(He leaps on the stoop.)

STASIA: Don't go in there. Nat, don't. . . .

(He has already disappeared inside the cabin.)

WILLIE WITCHER (Appearing at right with a lantern): What's the matter with you, sister? Marse Francis hollering his head off.

STASIA: I'm coming.

WILLIE WITCHER: Well, come on. Got your new dress on?

(He holds the light up to her.) Oh, look at you. Got it wet already.

(From inside the cabin come muffled, angry voices.)

WILLIE WITCHER: Who that?

STASIA: Mind your own business.

WILLIE WITCHER: Man in there.

(The voices grow loud, fierce.)

STASIA: Highgrass.

WILLIE WITCHER: That you, Highgrass?

STASIA: He fall in mudhole. He clean himself.

WILLIE WITCHER: Come out, Highgrass. Marse Francis waiting for you.

(A sharp cry, a gasp; the sound of a body flung against the door. Then silence. *Willie Witcher* starts toward the cabin. *Stasia* tries to hold him with her hand, but he wrenches free.)

WILLIE WITCHER: Take your hand off.

(As he reaches the door, *Naomi* sidles out, shuts it behind her, and stands in front of him.)

NAOMI: Back again, deacon?

(He tries to get past her, but can't.)

Nothing fit for you to see in there, deacon.

WILLIE WITCHER: What you doing with Highgrass?

NAOMI: You wouldn't want me to tell you that, deacon. Bible say good folks hear no evil.

WILLIE WITCHER: Oh, you brazen hussy!

NAOMI: Oh, you greasy hypocrite! For twenty years every house gal on this place get big from you.

WILLIE WITCHER: Bedizened harlot from Babylon!

NAOMI: Skinny little peanut button! You'd come snooping after me, too—only you ain't got what with.

WILLIE WITCHER (Drawing himself up with all his dignity): Table gal! Huh! That what you call it.

(He marches down the steps.) Don't talk to me, woman.

(To *Stasia.*) Come on.

(As she hesitates.) Well, come on!

(He goes off left, *Stasia* reluctantly following. A long pause. *Naomi* throws the cabin door open. Inside, *Nat* is holding *Dred* upright, with a hand over his mouth. He lets *Dred* go. *Dred* gasps, stumbles out over the stoop, and falls headlong on the ground. He lies still. *Nat* stands ruefully over him.)

NAT: Didn't figure on killing my own.

NAOMI: Once you start pulling, no tell what you going to unravel.

NAT: He wouldn't come along, 'cause he was afraid to die.

NAOMI: Too late for crying now. Go about your business. I put him away.

(*Nat* starts slowly off, looking back as *Naomi* stoops to lift *Dred.*)

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 3

In the Big House, immediately after the last scene. Doors right and left and windows in the back. There are two silver candelabra with burning candles, drinks, an air of masculine luxury—but not much merriment. It is raining hard, with now and then a flash of lightning, a roar of thunder.

Through a window you can see *Peachy*, who is singing to his banjo, mournfully, on the veranda.

PEACHY (Singing): Hard rugged road, I most done traveling. . . .

WADE HAMPTON (An aging fop, getting fat and going to seed): Good weather for bulking.

SALATHIEL FRANCIS (Moving about fretfully): Good weather for trouble.

COLONEL EPPES (A gentleman of the old school): My tobacco's already bulked.

JOSEPH TRAVIS: Starting mine early tomorrow.

PEACHY: Hard rugged road. . . .

(A flash of lightning and a terrific thunder clap. *Peachy* falters; then begins again, but hesitantly, and so mournfully, he sounds as if he were crying!) I . . . I most done . . . traveling. . . .

WADE HAMPTON: Cheerful, that boy of yours, Salathiel.

SALATHIEL (Jumping up, striding to the window): Peachy! Peachy, come in here.

PEACHY (Coming in, quickly, but keeping his distance): Yassuh, Marse Francis.

SALATHIEL: Thought I told you I don't want that sad music.
PEACHY: Music?
SALATHIEL (With weary disgust): Sing something cheerful.
PEACHY: Cheerful?
SALATHIEL: Oh, my God! . . . Something lively, gay!
PEACHY: Please, Marse Francis. It thundering and lightning so hard.
SALATHIEL: What's the matter? You afraid to stay outside?
PEACHY: Bad luck to be cheerful when it lightning.
SALATHIEL: Do what I tell you. Come on. Stand over here.

(*Peachy* approaches the center of the circle in which the men sit. He is scared out of his wits. He breathes hard, looks around fearfully, wets his lips.)

WADE HAMPTON: Go on, sing, boy. I'll give you a nickel.
PEACHY (Singing, with great effort): I don't want to be like Judas in my heart. . . .
WADE HAMPTON (Laughing out loud): Ha-ha! Cheerful!
PEACHY (Getting worse): I don't want to be . . .
(Another flash and clap. He winces, falters.) to be . . . like Judas in my. . . .

(He stops.)

SALATHIEL (Jumps up, slaps him sharply across the face): Get out.
(*Peachy* runs out.) Stay on that veranda till I call you.
(A pause. The men drink. *Salathiel* turns on *Joseph*.) Go on. Say it. "You're too rough."
JOSEPH: No. I'm through.
SALATHIEL (Mocking him): "Only you know how to handle niggers."
WADE HAMPTON: Well, you *do* think that, Salathiel. Don't you?
SALATHIEL: And by God, it's true!
WADE HAMPTON: True tonight, Salathiel? A nigger wedding—and no buck.

(Laughs.)

SALATHIEL: Ha!
WADE HAMPTON: A party—and no guests.

(Laughs again.)

COLONEL EPPES (Politely, to change the subject): What do you suppose happened to Levi Waller and the Vaughns? Surely Levi didn't go to that camp meeting with the women folk.
JOSEPH: Rain, maybe.
WADE HAMPTON: Never knew Levi Waller to let water keep him from brandy.
COLONEL EPPES: Poor Levi! I can remember when he was the richest planter in the county. It's the times. The times, as the Bard says, are out of joint. The whole world's out of joint.
WADE HAMPTON: The market, Colonel. It's the market that's out of joint.
COLONEL EPPES: That backwoods brawler in the White House—with an eelskin in his hair—preaching his monstrous doctrine of equality. At diplomatic functions, *Mr.* Jackson, I hear, chews tobacco plug and spits. And *Mrs.* Jackson used to smoke a pipe like any old nigger mammy.
WADE HAMPTON: The market! Too much cotton. Everybody raising cotton. Whole country gone mad on cotton. Cotton's a curse, I tell you. It's a curse.
SALATHIEL: Did you hear a horse whinny?

PEACHY (Outside, suddenly bursting into song): Fisherman Peter, on the sea, on the sea. . . .
SALATHIEL: Stop that noise.

(A pause. All listen. Nothing now but rain.)

JOSEPH: Horse whinny? Where?
SALATHIEL: Peachy! Peachy! (*Peachy* looks in.) Go get Jim Press.

(*Peachy* vanishes.)

WADE HAMPTON (Eager to resume where he left off): I just came back from Charleston. On every highway, wagons groaning with cotton. On every river, pole-boats twelve tiers high with cotton. In every warehouse, on every square—all you see is cotton. All you hear is cotton speculators, thicker than locusts: "What's cotton at? What's cotton at?" And cotton, gentlemen, is . . . nine . . . cents . . . a pound!
JOSEPH: Slaves. There's the curse of the south. Slaves.
COLONEL EPPES: That's a funny way for a Southerner to talk.
WADE HAMPTON: Please, Travis, don't tell me you're one of those people.
SALATHIEL: This afternoon he got stern and put a bad nigger in stocks. Half hour later he got soft and turned him loose.
JOSEPH: I only wish to God I were free of mine.
JIM PRESS (Entering, wet): You want me?
SALATHIEL: This storm won't do that little bay mare any good, Jim Press.
JIM PRESS: She ain't in the storm, sir.
SALATHIEL: I just heard her whinny in the horse lot.
JIM PRESS: I gave her to the stable boy at sundown myself.
SALATHIEL: Go and see.
JIM PRESS: I don't leave none of your horses in the rain, Mr. Francis. I ain't in the habit of damaging your property, or stealing any, either.
SALATHIEL: Go and see.
JIM PRESS (Swallowing his fury): Yes, sir.

(He leaves.)

SALATHIEL: The market! The times! The slaves! Ha!—Peachy! Peachy, come in here.

(*Peachy* comes, timid and silent.)

SALATHIEL: Peachy, do you want to be free?
PEACHY: What say, Marse Francis?
SALATHIEL: I said: Do you want to be free?
PEACHY: Does I want to be. . . .
SALATHIEL: Free. Yes. To be free.
PEACHY: Be free. . . .
SALATHIEL: Don't ape me. Answer yes or no.
PEACHY (A pause. Then he laughs nervously): Lord, Marse Francis . . . I can't think of me being. . . .
SALATHIEL: Listen, you fool. When you're hungry, who feeds you? Answer me.
PEACHY: You do, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: When you're sick, who cares for you?
PEACHY: Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: Who gives you a cotton shirt in spring, a woolen one in fall, and a pair of shoes in winter?
PEACHY: Yassuh.
SALATHIEL: At Christmas, who gives you a peck of corn for a present? And

when you die, who'll give you a decent burial?

PEACHY: Yassuh, Marse. Yassuh.

SALATHIEL: Can you do any better for yourself if you're free? Answer me. Can you?

PEACHY: I . . . can't think of . . . me being . . . free. . . .

SALATHIEL: Get out of here, you fool! Get out!

(*Peachy* goes.) Idiot!

WADE HAMPTON: Only Salathiel knows how to handle niggers.

(Laughs loud.)

SALATHIEL (Turning on him in contempt): That's almost as funny as prostituting your pedigreed mares to jackasses, isn't it, Hampton?

WADE HAMPTON: Mighty fine animal, the mule. Eats little, works hard, lives long.

COLONEL EPPES: Hard times, Salathiel. Nothing wrong in breeding a few mules to fetch in a little money.

SALATHIEL: Or in keeping up a fine front, eh, Colonel Eppes, while you pinch your table and water your brandy?

WADE HAMPTON: Ah, life is for the strong.

SALATHIEL: Right.

JOSEPH: For those who reach out and take what they want, Salathiel. Like you, for instance.

SALATHIEL: Like me.

JOSEPH: Every year, gobbling up more land—by hook or by crook.

WADE HAMPTON: Every year, getting bigger, richer. Making more money, hand over fist.

SALATHIEL: And ten years ago I was nobody. Not good enough for the Hamptons.

WADE HAMPTON: But you married Judy anyway.

SALATHIEL: And I'm not through.

JOSEPH TRAVIS: Somebody's got to be on top—and you mean it to be you.

SALATHIEL: Right. I mean it to be me. I mean to damn near own this county. I mean to run it. I mean to run this state. Because unlike you, my virtuous neighbors, I know what I want.

JOSEPH: Power.

WADE HAMPTON: And women and wine.

SALATHIEL: And horses and crops and slaves and land. And I'll get them, too. I get what I want.

COLONEL EPPES: Don't become a cotton snob, Salathiel.

JOSEPH: That's all you see in life.

SALATHIEL: The "spiritual values," my philosophic brother-in-law, I'll leave to you. The tradition and the manners—

(Mocking bows to each of them.)—to you, Colonel Eppes, and Mr. Wade Hampton. I'll take the power.

JOSEPH: And when you've squeezed this country dry?

WADE HAMPTON: Posterity, Salathiel.

SALATHIEL: Let the next man worry about that. How do I know what's good for posterity? I know what's good for me.

(*Willie Witcher* enters, waits for recognition.) Well? Did you get her?

WILLIE WITCHER: Yassuh.

SALATHIEL: And Highgrass?

WILLIE WITCHER: She tell you about him.

SALATHIEL: All right. You go down to the horse lot and see what that fool Jim Press—

WILLIE WITCHER: Yassuh?
SALATHIEL: Never mind.

(*Willie Witcher* goes, *Joseph Travis* rises.)

JOSEPH: Well, tomorrow's Monday. Got to start bulking at sunup.
COLONEL EPPES: Still raining, isn't it?
JOSEPH: Rain all night, I reckon. Good night, gentlemen.
THE OTHERS: Good night. Good night, Joseph.

(As he leaves, *Stasia* comes in, stands silently.)

SALATHIEL: That your new dress?
STASIA: Yassuh.
SALATHIEL: How'd you get yourself all wet?
STASIA: Rain, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: Rain! Don't have to stand out in it, do you?
JOSEPH TRAVIS (Outside): Who's that? Come here. Come here, I say!

(The men in the room leap up and go to the rear window. *Stasia* searches till her eyes light on the gun cabinet, which straddles a corner near the right door. She starts toward it.)

SALATHIEL (At the window): What is it?
JOSEPH TRAVIS (Appearing at the window: an appearance which halts *Stasia* in her tracks): Somebody prowling in the bushes with a light.
SALATHIEL (Goes to the gun cabinet; opens it; takes out a shotgun): Where?
JOSEPH TRAVIS: Gone now.
SALATHIEL: Peachy! Peachy, who's out there with a light?
PEACHY (At other window in rear): Light?
SALATHIEL (Going to the window with the shotgun): Jim Press? That you, Jim Press?—Damn him!
PEACHY: Ain't seen no light.
SALATHIEL: Hell!

(Still holding the shotgun, he strides angrily toward the left door.) Willie Witcher! Come in here.

WADE HAMPTON: Probably one of your impeccable slaves, Salathiel, slipping home without a pass.
SALATHIEL: I'll take his hide off.

(To *Willie Witcher*, who has entered.) See who's in the bushes with a light.

WILLIE WITCHER: Right away, Marse Francis.

(He leaves.)

SALATHIEL (Putting the gun away and locking the cabinet): There's one nigger you can trust. Don't know what's got into Jim Press. Used to be a good overseer.
JOSEPH TRAVIS: Try paying him more. Well, see you again.

(He goes. The men reseat themselves.)

SALATHIEL (To *Stasia*): You've kept me and my guests waiting nearly an hour.

(No answer.) Don't suppose you know where Highgrass is, do you? Just as you didn't know where Nat Turner was when you had him in your cabin.

STASIA: I know where Highgrass.
SALATHIEL: Can you tell me? Or is it a secret?
STASIA: He get lost in swamp. Fall in mudhole. Clean himself now. He be here soon.

SALATHIEL: Go in the kitchen and dry yourself. And don't go away.

(At the doorway, *Stasia* passes *Jim Press,* entering. She lingers, listening.)

SALATHIEL: Well!
JIM PRESS: There ain't no mare in the horse lot, Mr. Francis.
SALATHIEL: I was just going to send Willie Witcher after you.
JIM PRESS: I went way down to the willow grove by the creek. There ain't no mare.
SALATHIEL: Thank you. Good night. (But *Jim Press* remains, fidgeting with his hat.) I said good night.
JIM PRESS: I want my money, Mr. Francis.
SALATHIEL: Your money?
JIM PRESS: Yes. My pay money.
SALATHIEL: Pay day's a week from Thursday.
JIM PRESS: I'm quitting now.
SALATHIEL: Quitting? All right—though, just out of curiosity, I'd like to know what for.
JIM PRESS: I just want my money.
SALATHIEL: Tomorrow morning.
JIM PRESS: I'm leaving tonight.
SALATHIEL: You *are* in a hurry, aren't you?
JIM PRESS: I want my money now, Mr. Francis.
SALATHIEL: Say, what the hell's got into you?
JIM PRESS: Ain't nothing got into me, Mr. Francis—'cept I'm leaving here tonight.

(*Salathiel* rises, unlocks the drawer of the table, takes out some bills and counts them with ironic precision into *Jim Press's* hand.)

SALATHIEL: Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five. And don't ever come back to me for a job.

(*Jim Press* counts the money over and puts it, folded carefully, into his pocket. Then, his last trace of obsequiousness vanishing, he bites out.)

JIM PRESS: I don't figure I'm ever coming back, Mr. Francis. If I was you, I wouldn't worry about that.

(*Jim Press* goes. *Salathiel* then observes *Stasia* in the doorway.)

SALATHIEL: I thought I told you to go in the kitchen. What's the matter with you? Have all you people gone crazy?

(She starts going, but stops at the door as *Willie Witcher* trots in, eyes popping, fearfully excited.)

WILLIE WITCHER: Marse Francis! Marse Francis! I seen 'em. I seen 'em.
SALATHIEL: Seen what?
WADE HAMPTON: Look at him trembling.
WILLIE WITCHER (Beside himself with fear): There's a million of them.
SALATHIEL: Stop gibbering. What'd you see?
WILLIE WITCHER: They got horses and guns—and scythes!

(He begins to sob.)

COLONEL EPPES: Who's got scythes?
WADE HAMPTON: That old boy's gone crazy.
WILLIE WITCHER (Shrieking: completely beside himself with fear): Run,

Marse, run! They going to kill you. Run, Marse!

(*Peachy* sticks his head into the doorway.)

WADE HAMPTON: My God, what is it?
COLONEL EPPES (Pulling down the two crossed swords that hang over the fireplace and unsheathing one): Are these sharp?

(He feels the edge and point.)

SALATHIEL: Willie Witcher!
(Shakes him with both hands.) Willie Witcher, listen to me!
(Willie subsides.) You pull yourself together. Do you hear?
WILLIE WITCHER (Sobbing quietly): Yassuh. Lord save you, Marse.

(He bends over and begins to kiss *Salathiel's* hand.)

SALATHIEL (Pulling his hand away): Never mind that. Tell me what you saw.
WILLIE WITCHER: Men on horses—hundreds, thousands of 'em.
SALATHIEL: Where?
WILLIE WITCHER: In the willow grove along the creek.
SALATHIEL: White men?
WILLIE WITCHER: No, Marse. No. Black.

(A stunned silence.)

COLONEL EPPES: Impossible!
SALATHIEL: Willie, you're lying.
WADE HAMPTON: He's dreaming.
WILLIE WITCHER (Dropping on his knees, seizing *Salathiel's* coat): Run, Marse, please. For old Willie Witcher's sake. The quarters is all empty. Ain't no soul nowhere. They going to kill you.
COLONEL EPPES: It can't be.
WADE HAMPTON: Salathiel! It's a nigger rising!
SALATHIEL: Don't be an ass.

(*Stasia* has meanwhile moved again toward the gun cabinet. Now, quickly, she removes the key, drops it in her bosom, and with a quick movement, slips silently from the room. At the doorway she jolts *Peachy*, who is peering open-mouthed, into the room. He retreats into a corner.)

SALATHIEL: Here you! Come back here. Stop her!
COLONEL EPPES (Running after her with the sword): Stop, gal! Stop, I say.

(*Wade Hampton* follows him out.)

SALATHIEL (Shaking off *Willie Witcher*, still clinging to his coat): Let go! Get up off the floor.
(Looking around, he sees *Peachy* in the corner.) What are you doing over there?
PEACHY (Backing farther into the corner): Me, Marse?
SALATHIEL: Get away from the cabinet.
PEACHY (Cringing against the cabinet): I sing like you tell me, Marse.
SALATHIEL: Don't touch those guns.
PEACHY: Ain't got no gun, Marse.
SALATHIEL: Come out of there. Come out!
PEACHY (Stepping away, in panic): Yassuh, Marse.
SALATHIEL (Goes to the cabinet, finds no key, whirls on *Peachy* in cold fury): Where's the key?
PEACHY: Key?
SALATHIEL: Don't give me that. Where's the key?

PEACHY: Never seen no key.
SALATHIEL: What'd you do with it? The key!
PEACHY: Ain't got no key, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: It was there a minute ago. Where'd you hide it?
PEACHY: All I got's my banjo.

(*Salathiel* seizes from the floor the other sword that was hanging above the fireplace. He whips it from its scabbard and thrusts it against the boy.)

SALATHIEL: I'll give you five seconds to hand over that key. Quick, now. Where is it?
PEACHY: My banjo. That's all I got —my banjo.
SALATHIEL: Did you give it to somebody? Who? Stasia?
PEACHY: Please don't hurt me. Please, Marse Francis.
SALATHIEL: You took it for them. You gave it to them. Oh, you little black traitor! Plotting. Plotting in my own house.
PEACHY (Sobbing): Please, Marse. All I got's my banjo.
SALATHIEL (White with rage; pinning him with the sword): What'd you do with that key? Talk, you black fiend. Talk, before I kill you.

(*Peachy*, out of his head, makes a break for the door. *Salathiel* grasps him with one hand, hurls him back against the cabinet, and stabs him with the sword.)

PEACHY: All I got's . . . my banjo. . . .

(The banjo falls to the ground with a clang. *Peachy* keels over, dead. *Salathiel* drops his sword, kneels, searches the boy's clothes, finds nothing and curses under his breath. Now, at sword's point, *Nat Turner* and *Stasia* are brought in by *Colonel Eppes* and *Wade Hampton*.)

WADE HAMPTON (Holding up the lantern): We got him—lantern and all.
SALATHIEL: She's got the key to the gun cabinet. Search her.
STASIA (As *Colonel Eppes* searches her): You never find that key.
NAT TURNER (To *Salathiel*): You kill that boy?
SALATHIEL: Who's going to judge me? A slave like you?
NAT TURNER: You done been judged.
SALATHIEL: If you've got any foolhardy followers out there, tell them to lay down their arms.
NAT TURNER: He that stealeth a man and selleth him, he shall surely be put to death.
SALATHIEL: You'll go first.
NAT TURNER: You can't scare me, Salathiel Francis. I done died, a long time ago.
SALATHIEL: I'll spare your life. Tell your men to lay down their arms and I'll let them go.
NAT TURNER: When the first shall be last and the last shall be first, I lay down the laws.
SALATHIEL: You're crazy if you think you can get away with this.
NAT TURNER: This night, saith the Lord, I shall be a swift witness against them that buildeth their house by unrighteousness.

(As he speaks, he picks up one of the candelabra and moves slowly toward the window.)

SALATHIEL: Not so easy, slave!

(He picks up the sword and lunges at *Nat*. *Nat* dodges, but the candelabra is knocked from his hand. *Colonel Eppes* and *Wade Hampton* rush at him, but he calmly turns over a table as a barrier against them.)

(Meanwhile, *Stasia* has picked up the other candelabra and run from the room. Darkness. Sounds of scuffle. Outside the window, *Stasia* raises the light three times for the insurrectionists' signal.)

WADE HAMPTON: Look out!
SALATHIEL: I've got him!
COLONEL EPPES: He's here!

(Outside, suddenly, the sound of horses' hooves, cries, flickering lights. Black faces crowd the doorway: in the foreground, *Highgrass, Wagoner Sam, Blacksmith Nelson, Stasia, Naomi.* Behind are scythes, pitchforks, swords and guns. Pine torches throw flare into the room. The white men are disheveled. *Wade Hampton* is on the floor. A long, long silence as black and white confront each other.)

HIGHGRASS: I come for the wedding, Marse Francis. Your wedding with death.
COLONEL EPPES: Naomi! Naomi, run for help.
NAOMI: How can I run, Marse Colonel? It's raining.
WADE HAMPTON: Sam! Nelson! You know me. I've always been good to my people. You wouldn't hurt me.
WILLIE WITCHER: They all good. Please, Wagoner Sam: don't let 'em hurt my white folks.
STASIA: There's Judas talking.
BLACKSMITH NELSON: Did you cry, old Judas, when they kill little Peachy?
SALATHIEL: Highgrass, put down that scythe.
HIGHGRASS: I put it down, Marse Francis. Down your belly.

(*Highgrass* begins advancing. *Salathiel* hurls a chair at him and retreats to the left door. *Colonel Eppes* joins him. The negroes now move out of the doorway, across the room.)

WADE HAMPTON (On the floor): Salathiel! Salathiel!

(But it is *Colonel Eppes* who turns, lifts him up, helps him through the door. Now *Willie Witcher* flings himself at the closing door, wedges a leg in, beats against it with his fists.)

WILLIE WITCHER: Marse Francis! Marse Francis! Don't leave me.

(*Salathiel* puts an arm out and pushes him off so roughly that he falls down. The door is slammed and bolted.)

(Huddled beneath the door, sobbing.) Oh, Marse Francis!
NAT TURNER: Give me that ax.

(He takes an ax from *Wagoner Sam* and, with slow measured strokes, begins to chop down the door. The Negroes, in spreading across the room, topple over furniture, chairs, smash bric-a-brac. To the stroke of the ax, *Highgrass* starts singing. Soon all are singing, shouting rather.)

NEGROES: Shout, oh, children,
Shout, you free!
Now you has your liberty.
You no more slave—
You free, free, free. . . .

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

An unkempt back room in the house of Colonel Eppes later the same night. The candles have burned low and are sputtering.

Across a table sprawls young Culbert Ryles, clothes disheveled, hair mussed, face red with drink. On the table and floor, bottles and glasses.

A faint click; cautiously the door opens; and Naomi, head covered against the rain, slips in. She is startled by the man sleeping on the table, tries to tiptoe past him. She almost does, but he lifts his head and watches her a moment.

CULBERT RYLES: Whoa!

(*Naomi,* startled, stops, but doesn't turn.) Come back.

NAOMI (Going up to him, contemptuously): Hunh! Just what Marse Colonel say: "Go see if my no-account son-in-law ain't drinking his head off."

CULBERT RYLES: What time is it?

NAOMI: Two o'clock.

CULBERT: Old Skinflint gone to bed?

NAOMI: He staying at Marse Francis, cause of the rain.

CULBERT: Rain! You mean old Bottle-nose is up to his ears in brandy.

NAOMI: I reckon he dead to the world by now.

CULBERT (Letting out a wild, malicious cackle): Ha! Not often he gets a crack at his neighbor's liquor. Too stingy to drink his own. Bet he made you walk.

NAOMI: Yes.

CULBERT: In the rain.

NAOMI: He tell me to go home and put you to bed.

CULBERT (Searching the glasses and bottles for a drink): With you? How considerate of him.

NAOMI: He figure you up to your old tricks.

CULBERT: Did he say that?

NAOMI (Malicious): He say: "Naomi, I don't want no yellow slaves."

CULBERT: In public?

NAOMI: 'Fore everybody.

CULBERT (Smashing a glass down): The old penny-pincher! That sanctimonious old fraud! Colonel Graham Epps, the hobby-horse Napoleon of the Cross Keyes marshes—he knows I'm up to my old tricks.

NAOMI: Don't holler so loud.

CULBERT: If anybody was tricked it was me—me! Why'd he think I married into his scrofulous, worm-eaten, mouldy old family!

NAOMI: You think he got money.

CULBERT: But did I ever find any!

NAOMI: Not because you ain't look everywhere.

CULBERT: Look at this place!

(He sweeps the glasses off the table.) Fit for pigs.

NAOMI: Where you want to souse—in the parlor?

CULBERT: Parlor's locked up. Horses—locked up. Liquor—locked up. Think of me—Culbert Ryles—having to beg from friends to drink like a gentleman.

NAOMI: Yes, yes. Heard all that before. Come to bed.

CULBERT (Seizes her hand, pulls): This way.

NAOMI: Not tonight.

CULBERT: What's different about tonight?

NAOMI: I'm all wet.
CULBERT: I'll dry you.
NAOMI: It's two o'clock.
CULBERT: Five hours till seven.
NAOMI: You drunk. You couldn't do nothing in bed nohow.

(She frees herself from his hands, and he totters back into a chair. She puts all but one candle out.)

CULBERT: Let me show you.
NAOMI: You show me last Saturday. Turn over and snore. Come on now. Get up.

(She tries to lift him; he turns and clings to her.)

CULBERT (Maudlin): Be nice to me, brown sugar. Be nice to me. I got a slut for a wife. Gone to the camp meeting, she says. As if I don't know where she went.
NAOMI: Then stop her. You her man, ain't you?
CULBERT: What I want that skinny little mackerel in bed for? Let him have her. You're warm and soft. Sweet, like a pile of new-mown hay. Be nice to me, sugar baby.

(He buries his face in her neck and bosom; kisses her.)

NAOMI: Stop that slobbering!
(She tries to push him off, but he hangs on. Now somebody pounds on the door. Both stand still.)
CULBERT: The hell with them!
(But the pounding continues: Louder.) All right. All right. See who it is.

(*Naomi* goes slowly to the door, opens it. She gasps with surprise; steps quickly back into the dark. *Dred* staggers in, a horrible mixture of blood and mud.)

DRED (Teetering before *Culbert*): Jerusalem! Marse—Jerusalem—
CULBERT: Where you from? Who gave you permission—
(He suddenly sees Dred's wound.) What is it?
DRED: Can't stand no more.
CULBERT: There.

(*Dred* falls into the chair.)

DRED: Water, please.
CULBERT (To Naomi): Get him some water.
(She gets it for him, averting her face.) Who cut you?
DRED: Nat Turner.
CULBERT: Fight?
(*Dred* doesn't answer, gasps, drinks the water.) Well, talk up.
DRED: Got to tell Jerusalem. They marching on her. Going to capture the arsenal. Take the guns—

(Gasps for air.)

CULBERT: Talk sense, boy. Who's marching on Jerusalem?
DRED: Nat Turner. Got a big army. Slaves.
CULBERT: No!
DRED: He stab me 'cause I won't come with him. Throw me in the swamp for dead. Crawl here—crawl on my hands and knees. Please, Marse, go tell Jerusalem. Tell 'em: *kill that nigger!*
CULBERT (Stares at him a moment, trying to grasp it. Then he bursts into loud laughter): So the worms are turning! Just docile children. Old Massa's people. The fleas are going to fight the lions.
(To *Naomi*, when he can control

himself.) Wake up Cudjoe. Tell him I've got to have a horse.

(*Naomi* goes quickly. *Culbert* puts on his coat and starts to leave.)

DRED: Please, Marse. Get me a doctor.
CULBERT: What do you want a doctor for? They'll probably put the whole race to the sword, anyhow.
DRED: My side hurt me so.
CULBERT: You're a fine nigger, aren't you? What'd you do it for? How'd you feel while you crawled here on your hands and knees? Did it soothe you to think the white folks would pat you on the head and say: "Good boy!"?
DRED (Seizing his arm): Get me a doctor.
CULBERT (Shaking him off): Don't touch me. You're loathsome. You're all alike. There's a Nat Turner on every plantation.
DRED: I'm different. I'm faithful.
CULBERT: Faithful! You aren't even faithful to your own kind.
NAOMI (At the door): Cudjoe waiting.
CULBERT: Faithful! Ha!
(To *Naomi*, as he leaves.) Get him a doctor.

(*Naomi* watches *Culbert* go. A long pause. Finally she turns to the table, picks up the candle.)

NAOMI: Let me see that wound.

(As he sees her face in the candlelight, *Dred* stiffens.)

DRED: You—how you get here?
NAOMI: Walk. How you?
DRED: Get away from me. Don't touch me.
NAOMI: How I going to help you if I can't see your wound?
DRED: Don't want no help from you.
NAOMI (Shrugging, as she walks away): Ain't no gaping hole in my side.
DRED (Sinking back in the chair): Get me a doctor.
NAOMI: Can't get no doctor.
DRED: Please, Naomi.
NAOMI: Doctor can't help you. You all sick inside.

(*Dred* struggles to rise from the chair.)

DRED: I got to get a doctor.
NAOMI: Eight miles to a doctor. Going to crawl that on your hands and knees?
DRED (Half lifting himself): Oh, Lord, give me strength, Lord! Give me strength.
NAOMI (Goes to him): Sit down. You most done in.
(She pushes him contemptuously; he drops in the chair.) Let me see that wound.
DRED: You ain't going to hurt me?
NAOMI: I'm a doctoring woman, and a sworn midwife, ain't I?
(She lifts the candle to the wound.) Put your hand down.

(A pause.) Umn.

DRED: Yes?
NAOMI: Bad.
DRED: How bad?
NAOMI: You going to die.
DRED: No!
NAOMI: Yes, you going to die.
DRED: Please, please, Naomi. You a doctoring woman. Can't you save me?
NAOMI: Maybe. If you set still and put your hand down.

DRED (Bracing himself): All right.

(She jabs the wound with her fingers.) Look out. That hurt.

NAOMI: Both hands down.

(When he does so, she flings herself on him; with a quick brutal movement, rips the wound open. He shrieks in mortal agony.) There!

DRED: What you done?

NAOMI: Now you bleeding. Bleeding bad.

DRED: What you done to me, woman?

NAOMI: You going to bleed to death.

DRED: Get me a doctor. Get me a doctor!

NAOMI: Too late for a doctor.

DRED: He say you get me a doctor.

NAOMI: You crazy to think I get you a doctor.

(Panting from the effort, *Dred* lifts himself up, lunges for the door. *Naomi* intercepts him.) You ain't going nowhere. Not tonight.

(She shoves him savagely down in the chair.) You set there. You set there till you die.

DRED: No! No!

NAOMI (Sitting down across the table and folding her hands): Yes. And I'm going to set here and watch you.

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE 2

In the Great Dismal Swamp, the same night, just before daybreak. A few pine torches in the background, with now and then movement of dark figures, or a muffled sound.

In the foreground, asleep on the ground, lie *Highgrass, Wagoner Sam* and *Blacksmith Nelson.* A few feet away, by the light of a pine torch stuck in the ground, *Nat Turner* crouches, drawing a map with a stick. He ponders over it, shakes his head, changes it. *Stasia* enters with an iron pot.

STASIA: Here your beans.

NAT (Without looking up from his map): Not now.

STASIA: Got to eat.

NAT: Give it to them.

(Points to the sleeping men.)

STASIA: You ain't sleep, either.

NAT: Got to study war. Can't make no slip now. One little slip mean sixty lives.

STASIA: War! War! More killing to do.

NAT (Looking up at her): Yes. More killing to do. So we sleep in peace after.

STASIA: Don't reckon there ever be an after.

NAT: Oh, yes. A long after. A big after, full of glory.

STASIA: You figure you live to see it?

NAT: I see land, where we pick the fruit of our own labor. Schools, where we learn what wise men say. Laws, so we live free—with no sun bitter in our mouths and no hump in our souls.

(*Stasia* does not answer: a pause.) I hear you. "What about me that jump the stick with you?"

STASIA: I ain't like you, Nat. I live in the lowlands.

NAT: "Want somebody to sit by my side when I come home from the field with the sweat running down my feet."

STASIA: Feelings don't change just by saying so.

NAT: "You don't make no more man for a woman than a eagle."

STASIA: Redic need a pappy. He getting too wild.

NAT: Don't I want to lay on a soft bed at night? Put my head on a soft bosom—close my eyes—feel safe and warm?

STASIA: Not you, Nat. You can't.

NAT: Something eat me all the time. Eat me inside.

STASIA: The little serpent.

NAT: Maybe that little serpent.

HIGHGRASS (Waking from sleep with a shudder): Lord, Lord! I dream a tiger eat my hand.

NAT: No time for dreaming. Daylight coming soon.

(He goes to the sleeping men.) Nelson—Sam—wake up! Got to take Jerusalem.

WAGONER SAM: Never knowed a man could be so hungry.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: I'm stiff all over.

NAT: Once we take Jerusalem, we sleep in the sun.

STASIA (Putting the iron pot down before them): Here. Eat.

(The men dig into the pot with their hands. *Highgrass* takes a mouthful, makes a wry face, spits it out in disgust.)

HIGHGRASS: Blackstrap and beans.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: What you want? Chicken?

HIGHGRASS: Sure. Chicken and pig. Yams and melon. Apple and corn pone.

NAT: Jerusalem, that golden town, flowing with honey and milk.

HIGHGRASS: Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Why can't we eat now?

NAT (Tracing it on the map): Wait. Only three mile to go.

HIGHGRASS: Wait! Wait! That's what you say all night. Wait till we get to the swamp. Wait till we take Jerusalem.

NAT: Once we take Jerusalem, we eat and sleep in peace.

HIGHGRASS: Last time it was once we take Salathiel Francis. Guns, bullets, food—that's what you say. Real army, once we take Salathiel Francis.—Can't eat bullets.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Stop crying. First it's sleep. Then it's eat.

WAGONER SAM: Half hour mighty little sleep.

NAT: Fall on Jerusalem in the dead of night. Seize the arsenal. And the walls come tumbling down.

HIGHGRASS: Three mile! Through the swamp, I guess. Up to your chin in water and mud.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: I nearly twice your age. Don't hear me cry!

HIGHGRASS: Why can't we take the road? Ain't nobody stop us now.

NAT (Poring over the map): Strike like lightning in the dark. Hide in the swamp between time. Nobody know where we strike next.

HIGHGRASS: Ain't that serpent say the Lord stretch forth his right arm and smite our enemies? Why can't he stretch forth his arm in a road as good as a swamp?

NAT: Safer we go through the swamp, soft like the fox.

(A pause.)

HIGHGRASS (Sly): Parker's place on that road. Joel Parker like to hunt. Must be fifteen gun in that house.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: We could use them guns.

WAGONER SAM: I got two cousins at Parker's, Will and Jack.

NAT: Road too open. Safer we go through the swamp.

HIGHGRASS: What's the matter, Nat Turner? You afraid?

WAGONER SAM: Won't be nobody on that road this time of night.

HIGHGRASS: Ain't we prove we brave? Sixty brave men. Supposing we meet somebody? Who going to stop us?

NAT: Won't meet nobody, 'cause we go through the swamp.

(*Highgrass* leaps up angrily and kicks over the pot of beans.)

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Sit down, Highgrass.

HIGHGRASS: He act like he king of the blacks.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Hush your mouth.

HIGHGRASS: We free now. Free men don't take no orders.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: That mouth get you in trouble.

HIGHGRASS: Ain't we fight like him? Ain't we risk our skin like him? Why ain't we got as much to say?

WAGONER SAM: That's true, Nat.

HIGHGRASS: "We go through the swamp!" Nat Turner do the talking. *You* obey. Is that what we tramp in mud and blood for? Is that what we kill Marse Francis for? So we have a *black* Marse 'stead of a white?

WAGONER SAM: That's true, Nat.

HIGHGRASS: Free men is equal. They hold up their hand and say "Aye" and "Nay." I seen 'em.

NAT: No time for holding up our hand.

HIGHGRASS: No time to eat. No time to sleep. No time for holding up our hand.

NAT: That come later.

HIGHGRASS: Why not now?

NAT: 'Cause we got to act together now.

HIGHGRASS: 'Cause we got to act like *you* say now. But what say Wagoner Sam and Blacksmith Nelson? I dare you to ask 'em.

NAT: Got to be like one fist now.

(Holds up a black fist.) Too weak to separate like fingers.

(Spreads the fingers of his hand.) Enemies on all sides. Got to lay low, strike hard, move fast. One word, one slip mean sixty lives.

HIGHGRASS: I dare you. I dare you to ask 'em.

NAT: Once we take Jerusalem, seize the arsenal, issue the call—once they come, them million blacks—once we strong and armed to the teeth, so no man dare to touch us—then we sit down, we talk things over. Then we raise our hand, say "Aye" and "Nay."

HIGHGRASS: Ha! You don't dare to ask 'em.

(He strides over to Wagoner Sam.) Wagoner Sam, will you go with me to Joel Parker's and get them guns?

NAT: Sam!

HIGHGRASS: Say "Aye" or "Nay."

WAGONER SAM (Slowly, eyeing Nat as he raises his hand): Aye.

NAT: Highgrass, you listen to me—

HIGHGRASS (Striding over to Blacksmith Nelson): Blacksmith Nelson, is you a free man, like Wagoner Sam? Or do you take orders?

NAT: Nelson, Nelson!

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Sure all you want's them guns?

HIGHGRASS: What else?

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Wouldn't be no chicken and pig, apple and corn pone?

HIGHGRASS (Mortally offended): You call that a preacher? Wagoner Sam never talk like that to a brother in arms.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: I talk like I feel. Ain't me inch along for thirty years till I the best wagoner in the county?

HIGHGRASS: Say "Aye" or "Nay."

BLACKSMITH NELSON: I say like this:

(He pauses to think clearly, to formulate his mind.) Jerusalem a mighty big town. We could use them guns. Use Will and Jack. Let Highgrass take half the men and go to Parker's.

NAT: Wrong! Wrong!

HIGHGRASS (Elated): The free men done speak. Come along, Sam!

NAT (Intercepting him, seizing his arm): Highgrass, listen to me—

HIGHGRASS: Take your hand off.

NAT: I don't let you go.

HIGHGRASS: Still ordering!

NAT: Begging, Highgrass. Begging, not ordering. For weeks I draw plans, make maps. I figure every mile of road, every foot of swamp, every bend and turn. I know what's safe, Highgrass.

HIGHGRASS: You the only one that ever make plans?

NAT: I'm afraid, Highgrass. Yes, yes—I'm 'fraid. 'Fraid something go wrong—somebody see you on that open road—give the alarm! Sixty lives, Highgrass. Sixty lives on my hands!

HIGHGRASS: You tired. You overstrung. Better get some sleep while I go to Parker's.

NAT: You ain't going, Highgrass. You can't smash my plans like that.

HIGHGRASS (Pushing him off): Let me go, I say. Take your hand off.

(He frees himself, runs toward the shadows in the rear, shouting.) Thirty men to go to Parker's! Who'll go to Parker's?

NAT: Highgrass, don't go! Don't go, Highgrass!

BLACKSMITH NELSON (Restraining him): Nat! Nat!

HIGHGRASS (In the rear): You ready — Henry — Cuffee — Zed? Thirty men to Parker's!

(In the background, cries, movement, torches. *Nat*, defeated, stops, hangs his head.)

BLACKSMITH NELSON: I can't see no harm in that.

NAT: Wrong! Wrong! Something go wrong!

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Try to get some sleep, Nat.

NAT (Walking away from him): Sleep!

(Then, without looking up.) Go with him. Make him keep still. Make him come right back. Got to take Jerusalem before sunup.

BLACKSMITH NELSON (Coming close to him): Forgive me if I rile you, Nat. I do the best I can.

NAT: Go with him.

(*Blacksmith Nelson* hesitates, shakes his head, then goes. *Nat* looks at his map on the ground, kicks it to pieces with his foot, walks away. Pause.)

STASIA: Nat. Willie Witcher beg to talk with you.
NAT: Can't talk now.
STASIA: He's an old man, Nat. Sick old man.
NAT: Not now.
STASIA: You getting so hard, Nat. I don't know you no more.
NAT (After a moment): All right.
STASIA (Calling off stage): Let Willie Witcher come.

(*Willie Witcher* appears, his hands bound behind him. He is stripped of his fine clothes and half naked. He seems smaller, more shriveled than ever.)

WILLIE WITCHER: Thank you, sister.

(*Stasia* leaves.)

(After a pause.) Let me go.
NAT: Why?
WILLIE WITCHER: I'm no good to you.
NAT: How I know you won't play Judas again?
WILLIE WITCHER: I'm an old dog. I want to go off and die somewhere.
NAT: Don't you want to be free?
WILLIE WITCHER: No.
NAT: Even a rabbit want to be free.
WILLIE WITCHER: What do I want with freedom? Where I go? How I act? I can't live without Marse Francis. I want to die too.
NAT: You love him so much?
WILLIE WITCHER: Love him? No. But all my life I live in his house. I break his bread and eat his salt. He my cloud by day and my pillar of fire by night. When he live, everything in the world have its place. Even an old dog like Willie Witcher. I was Marse Francis' personal valet. Now look at me.
NAT: Don't look different from nobody else.
WILLIE WITCHER: They took away my shiny shoes. They steal my purple coat with the pretty brass buttons. I don't know what I done to deserve all that. Maybe the Lord just try me with troubles, like Job.

(*Nat* studies him a moment, then goes to him, unties his hands.)

NAT: I let you go.
WILLIE WITCHER: Thank you, Nat Turner. I'll pray the Lord to forgive you what you done.

(*Nat* watches him go, while *Stasia* enters, unobserved. Then *Nat* returns to the map, tries to retrace the lines he has erased, shakes his head, gives up.)

STASIA (Who has been watching him): You never going to rest?
NAT: Ain't they come back yet?
STASIA: Lay down, Nat. Get yourself some sleep.
NAT: Don't you hear nothing?
STASIA (Listening): No.
NAT: Sound like shooting.
STASIA: Bullfrog, maybe.
NAT: Never shoulda let 'em go.
STASIA (Sitting down on a hummock): Lay down, Nat. Lay down here.
NAT: It's wrong. Wrong! Something tell me it's wrong.
STASIA: You can't go on like that: all knotted and pulling inside. The wind going to blow tomorrow, Nat. You got to be easy and free.
NAT: Wrong! Wrong! Like hammers in my head.
STASIA: Come here, by me. Put your head in my lap.

NAT (Obeying her distractedly): All the time they talk, a voice keep saying inside: "It's wrong—it's wrong! Don't listen to 'em. Don't let 'em go."

STASIA: Close your eyes. Now say after me: "Go away, little serpent. Give this man some peace." Go on, say it.

NAT: Go away, little serpent. Give this man. . . .

STASIA: Some peace.

NAT: Peace—and bring Highgrass back soon.

(A ripping sound in the underbrush. *Nat* leaps up. *Blacksmith Nelson* runs in out of breath.)

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Nat! Nat! Highgrass going on down the road.

NAT: Going where?

BLACKSMITH NELSON: To Jerusalem.

NAT (Shaking him with both hands): You! Why ain't you stop him?

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Tried to. Tried to, Nat.

(*Nat* releases him.) But after he lick the white folks, I couldn't.

NAT: White folks? Lick the white folks?

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Eighteen of them. All on horses. One of them was Culbert Ryles.

NAT: Guns?

BLACKSMITH NELSON (Nodding): Our men scatter at first. But Highgrass call them together, charge like a wild man.

NAT: He kill 'em? All of 'em?

BLACKSMITH NELSON: Twelve get away.

NAT: Twelve! Twelve tongues to talk!

BLACKSMITH NELSON: After that he puff his chest till he nearly pop open. I argue with him. I beg, I scold, I cry. "Then go back," he say. "Tell *Marse* Turner to come along after—road or swamp—any way he like. *I'm* going to Jerusalem."

NAT (Crying out in grief): Moses, Moses, high up on Pisgah, look down on the land of Gilead, but thou shalt not go thither.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: What can I do, Nat? Tell me, what can I do?

NAT: What can I do? Tell me what can I do? Why, howl, howl! For the dogs are loose.

BLACKSMITH NELSON: I'm sorry, Nat. Fool that I was, not to listen to you!

NAT: Too late for sorry. Go back to Highgrass. Tell him, turn around, or I'll kill him with my own hands. Go quick! We going to push on through the swamp.

(*Blacksmith Nelson* goes. *Nat* starts running toward the shadows in the rear, shouting.) Everybody up! Everybody ready! We marching! This way to Jerusalem!

(Answering cries, moving shadows, flickering torches. Suddenly, from offstage, a volley of shots. Everybody freezes. More shots, now closer.) What's that?

(*Wagoner Sam* rushes in, breathless, terrified.)

WAGONER SAM: Run, Nat! Run!

NAT: Who shoot? Answer me.

WAGONER SAM: Soldiers.

NAT: Soldiers?

WAGONER SAM: Soldiers, Nat.

Whole armies of 'em. They kill everybody. They coming this way.
NAT: Highgrass. Where's Highgrass?
WAGONER SAM: They shoot him. Shoot him in the heart.
NAT: In the heart. Shoot him in the heart.
WAGONER SAM (Grasping at Nat): Don't stand there staring like that. You get me into this. Now get me out.
NAT: Save yourself. Go hide in the swamp.

(*Wagoner Sam* clings to him; *Nat* pushes him gently off.) Go on, Wagoner Sam.

(*Wagoner Sam* runs off. *Nat* turns toward his men in the shadow of the swamp.) Listen, men. We got to scatter now. Every man for himself. Go hide in the swamp, deep in the swamp, one by one. Tomorrow night, when the moon go down, we meet here again. Go now.

(The pine torches are flung down and extinguished. The shadows slink away in the dark. *Nat* watches them, then turns to *Stasia.*) Go back to Redic, Stasia.
STASIA: What you going to do?
NAT: Fox go in his hole.
STASIA: No room for me?
NAT: Boy just turn seven need his mammy. (*Stasia* remains. There is a burst of gunfire, close now.) Go quick, Stasia.

(*Stasia* goes. *Nat* stands alone as the first spark of daybreak catches the trees.)

(Bitterly, to himself.) Brothers and friends. We have sworn to be slaves no more. Liberty and justice shall reign. Come and unite with us, brothers.

(Near by, another burst of fire. Cries and sounds in the underbrush.)

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE 3

In Jerusalem, ten weeks later, a cell in the county jail. A small barred window in the rear. At right, an iron door, now open. There is nobody in the cell. Through the open door come voices with a metallic ring.

CLERK'S VOICE: Have you reached a verdict, Mr. Foreman?
FOREMAN'S VOICE: We have.
CLERK'S VOICE: How say you now? Do you find the defendant guilty or not guilty?
FOREMAN'S VOICE: Guilty.

(A buzz of excitement; a murmur of voices.)

JUDGE'S VOICE (Over the rap-rap of a gavel): Order! Order in the courtroom!

(The sounds abate. Silence.) Nat Turner, stand up.

(A chair scrapes. Silence.)

Nat Turner, you have been arraigned and tried and convicted of one of the highest crimes in our criminal code. You have been convicted of plotting in cold blood the indiscriminate destruction of men, women and infant children. The evidence before us leaves not a shadow of doubt but that your hands were often imbued in the blood of the innocent. Borne down by this load of guilt, your only justification is that you were led away by fanaticism. If this be true, from my soul I pity you.

(A pause.) Have you anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced against you?

NAT TURNER'S VOICE: Ain't they crucify Christ?

(Buzz of excitement; rap-rap of gavel.)

JUDGE'S VOICE: The judgment of the court is that you be taken hence to the cell whence you came; then to the place of execution; and today, at sundown, you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead! dead! dead! and may the Lord have mercy on your soul.

(Excitement and buzz of voices; the scrape of chairs; then a door slams; the light, slanting through the open door is partially cut off; footsteps resound in a narrow hall. Then *Nat Turner* is led into the cell; the door is shut and locked, dimming the light still further. Silence. *Nat* turns around in one spot, as if to get his bearings; then he sinks down slowly on the wooden bunk. A long silence.)

VOICE (Outside the barred window): Ssst.

(*Nat* does not move.) Sssst!

(*Nat* sits up and listens. A hand appears on the window bars.)

NAT: Who that?

VOICE: No need to be afraid of me, Nat Turner.

NAT: Let me see you.

(Another hand appears; some one is drawing himself up.)

VOICE: Won't raise my voice and won't run away.

(The *Peddler's* head appears framed in the window.)

NAT: Mr. Snake!

PEDDLER: I bring you an apple, Nat Turner.

NAT: Sweet-talking little hump-back snake.

PEDDLER: See my apple? My perdy little apple? Won't you eat from my apple?

NAT: How you get here?

PEDDLER: Never knowed a white man to let go a hundred dollars.

NAT: I hunt for you, little snake. Six weeks I hunt for you in swamp. When night come, I creep out of my hole, like a fox, and go back to the meeting place in Cabin Ford Hollow. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday—nobody come. Not a soul. Not even a toad or a hoot owl. Nobody come.

PEDDLER: I figured they'd never catch you, Nat Turner.

NAT: I get tired, so tired. Couldn't wait no more.

PEDDLER: I came as soon as I could.

NAT: So I give myself up—to a seventeen-year-old boy with a dog and a gun.

PEDDLER: I was up north when I read about you. It's a long way from Boston to Virginia, and Fanny's getting old.

NAT: Read about me?

PEDDLER: Ten million people know your name, Nat Turner.

NAT: The Liberator!

PEDDLER: Everywhere up north. From Maine to farthest Kansas, that's all people say: "Did you hear? Did you hear about Nat Turner? He tried to free the slaves."

NAT (In wonder): Did you hear about Nat Turner!

PEDDLER: And everywhere down south. In New Orleans, whole city sitting up all night with guns in their laps. In Norfolk, in Richmond, in Raleigh; on every plantation: "Run, run! Nat Turner's coming. Nat Turner's coming."

NAT: He tried to free the slaves. And look what he done. His own people, beat and burned and hanged.

PEDDLER: What they'll remember is that he tried. Not just your people, but white folks, too.

NAT: That Mr. Garrison.

PEDDLER: And around him, more. Many more. Hundreds, thousands more. All the time, more. They used to say the slaves were happy. Nat Turner wasn't. They used to say the slaves were satisfied. Nat Turner wasn't. They used to say the slaves didn't want no freedom. Nat was ready to die for freedom.

NAT: If that's what they'll remember!

PEDDLER: Nat Turner was a slave, but he opened their eyes. And when he dies, they'll say: "Nat Turner was right. What he said was true. What he done was brave. In the name of Nat Turner, slavery must go. In the name of Nat Turner, his people must be free."

(A sharp wooden clap sounds through the window.)

NAT: They're testing the trap.

PEDDLER: I've got to get back to Fanny.

NAT: Sun's going down.

PEDDLER: Now that she's old, Fanny gets cold when the sun goes down.

(The sound of tramping feet on cobblestone.)

NAT: That's the guard coming.

PEDDLER: It's soldiers they're sending.

NAT: Goodbye, little snake.

PEDDLER (Starting to slip down): Goodbye, 'prisoned lion.

NAT (Close to the window): Turntail, last time.

PEDDLER: I was wrong, Nat Turner.

(His head slips out of sight, but *Nat* grasps the one hand still on the bars.)

NAT: Was you wrong, little snake, about armies marching?

PEDDLER (Head reappearing a moment): Sleep easy in the ground, Nat Turner. They'll be marching.

(He vanishes. *Nat* remains at the window. Now the footsteps are loud in the hall; they halt at the door; the door is thrown open. *Nat,* resolute and straight, steps into line, marches off.)

ROSEMARY PARIS

The Last Day

When Marguerite skied into the clearing above Sainte Croix she was suddenly aware of the dusk. It flowed from among the shrouded firs and rippled quietly along the slope. She thrust her poles into the snow and curved to a stop. There was no sound but the wind's murmur, and now that the hard blue sky no longer closed down upon her she felt free and light, sucked into the dusk's slow current and carried over the muffling snow.

Then, from among the trees behind her, she heard Zdenka's voice. It brought her sharply to herself. The dusk seemed to recede as she turned.

"Yoo-hoo, Rita. Goodness, there you are! Why did you leave me behind?" Zdenka was cross and bright-cheeked and dusted with snow from head to toe: it feathered her eyebrows and the fluff of yellow hair that escaped from her tight cap.

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to see how fast I could go." There was no way to explain, even to Zdenka, how the firs beckoned her on over the fresh snow where no one had been before her, and into the dusk. "Where're the others?"

"Oh, heavens, don't ask me. I suppose Monsieur Mermod is herding them through the trees like a flock of sheep." Zdenka stopped and wrinkled her nose mischievously. "How about one last cigarette?" She pulled a crumpled package from her hip pocket. "I guess I fell on them," she said ruefully, still panting after the hard run through the firs.

They sucked in the cigarette smoke experimentally, between pursed lips. Marguerite felt it warm and sharp on her tongue and with every puff she had to spit out threads of mitten wool.

"Wouldn't Mademoiselle have a stroke if she could see us now!" said Marguerite. She giggled.

"The old hen!" said Zdenka. Then she looked over the valley and sighed. Her breath wreathed about her head. "I wish we weren't going back to the *pensionnat* tomorrow."

"If we could only do something tonight," said Marguerite. "Something exciting." She looked down to find the village lights and they twinkled gaily.

Zdenka frowned. "Do you suppose Monsieur Mermod, or Maurice . . . ?"

Marguerite laughed. The lights did a little jig of pleasure. "I wonder if Maurice . . ." But the idea was too enormous for words. "He'd never want to do anything with us. He's always playing cards with the Germans in the hotel. Let's ask Monsieur Mermod if we can ski tonight." Her cigarette made her cough and she sent it spiraling over the snow. She leaned against Zdenka and squeezed her arm. "You ask him."

"No, you ask him," said Zdenka.

Marguerite tucked her wrists through the leather straps of her poles and jerked them loose. "Come on," she said, "I'll beat you."

"No fair! No fair!" screamed Zdenka.

Her voice thinned and was gone. Marguerite's skis carried her swiftly away. As she twisted among the huddled firs, throwing her weight first on one foot and then the other, the darkness burned against her face. She had time only for the fine balance of her body as she took the slopes straight on, gripping her quivering poles.

When she came to the foot of the last slope her skis slowed reluctantly to a dead stop. She felt her thoughts fold in upon her once more as the snow folded in over the blades of her skis. She looked back to see Zdenka coming over the brow of the last slope, a dark uncertain figure with her poles sticking out behind her. Marguerite laughed and clambered awkwardly over the snow bank at the edge of the lane leading to the shed where they kept their skis and, beyond it, to the village. She skirted a heap of manure and a wide yellow stain.

Zdenka caught up. "I wish," she moaned as she slithered on the icy lane, "you wouldn't be so speedy. I was frightened all alone. What if I'd broken my leg?"

"But it's so wonderful," said Marguerite. "It's like flying."

At the shed they sat down on the doorstep to undo their skis. The snow was shoveled back here too: trampled and tunneled and swept into place. Marguerite stood up to brush the loose snow off her suit. She wondered how Maurice would look on skis and then she laughed because she had never seen him in any shoes but patent leather evening pumps.

Zdenka propped her skis against the wall. "Now when Monsieur Mermod comes you ask him about tonight. It's our last chance."

Marguerite thought of the tall thick hedge that cut the *pensionnat* off from the rest of the city. There would be a smear of soot-stained snow over the lawn. "You're right," she said, "we must do something very special tonight."

Just then they heard the others coming down the lane. Monsieur Mermod was leading, with his jacket collar turned up against the cold and his legs moving in long strides.

"So you beat us," he said noncommittally, and then over his shoulder to the others, "come along now, it's late. Hurry up, hurry up."

"Why didn't you wait for us?" shrieked Ulla.

Lili waved. She looked like a bear in her heavy snowsuit. "I didn't fall down, really I didn't."

Pompi started to unstrap her camera. "Let me take one more picture with a flash bulb. I've got one in the shed."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, throw the thing away."

Marguerite listened to the hubbub. Their high-pitched voices divided and subdivided the night air as they crowded around the door of the shed. "They're rotten skiers, every one of them," she said to Zdenka. "They'll never learn." She laughed scornfully as Pompi sat down hard and began to wail.

Marguerite felt Zdenka nudge her. She heard the wooden floor's hollow echo as the girls walked over it in their heavy boots. She pushed among them to where Monsieur Mermod was rubbing his skis with the heel of his hand. He stood quiet and isolated in the midst of the confusion. She touched his arm lightly.

"What is it?" he asked, without looking up.

"Will you take Zdenka and me out skiing after dinner? It's our last night, you know."

He dropped his arms and turned to her. "You know that's impossible. Mademoiselle would never say yes."

"Monsieur, my hands are like lumps of ice," called Jops.

He smiled down at Marguerite indulgently. "Besides, you don't know enough to ski in the dark."

"Monsieur," shrieked Scilla, "I can't undo my skis. What shall I do?"

He shrugged and walked away to help Scilla. Marguerite sighed and put her arm around Zdenka's waist. "Come on, let's go back to the hotel. Monsieur Mermod is a rotten teacher. We're natural-born skiers, you and I, or we'd never have learned a thing."

"But it would have been fun," said Zdenka. She sniffed.

As they walked along the lane toward the Hotel d'Espagne they could see the lights getting closer, blurring together and spreading out. Each window glowed steadily under its snow-capped roof. Marguerite began to laugh. She was deliciously hungry and she could already smell the rolls heaped in their big basket on the table. She slapped Zdenka on the back and began to run. Her feet were thistledown without the skis and she kept ahead of Zdenka easily as they raced between the village houses. There were three boys playing with a sled in the square in front of the hotel. They stopped playing and stared.

"Ya, ya, ya," they shouted.

At the hotel steps the girls flopped down in the patch of light shining through the front door panes. Then Marguerite stopped laughing and began to kick the mound of snow so carefully shoveled back from the square.

"We could have a spread, but that would be dull. Terribly, terribly dull."

"We've had such fun. You won't forget me when school ends?" asked Zdenka.

Marguerite shook her head. She looked down at Zdenka's small hands folded on her knees, the small hands that could stitch interminably the tiny crosses of petitpoint handbags. She could never imagine what it would be like in Prague, where Zdenka lived, and where everyone spoke a noisy, incoherent language. "I'll write to you every day when school ends," she said, in a wondering voice. Perhaps Zdenka would carry the letters in the silk embroidery bag, just as she did her mother's, until they smelt sweet and musky and strange.

Zdenka smiled. "And I'll put your picture beside my bed at night when I go to sleep."

"Hello, girls. Have a good day?"

They jumped with shrieks of surprise. It was Maurice. He closed the hotel door behind him.

"Divine," said Zdenka. She looked at him primly.

He walked down the steps, his feet in patent leather pumps picking their way like a cat's, and his hands thrust in the pockets of his baggy golf knickers. As he passed, Marguerite smelt the rankness of his pipe tobacco. He stopped at the foot of the steps and turned around to look at them. For a moment he did not speak. He was very tall in the narrow square.

"You're going tomorrow?" he asked. "Not much of a vacation for you. Old Eagle Eyes hasn't let you play many tricks." He had a thick bass voice and Marguerite remembered how she had heard it tangled among the Germans' voices in the sitting-room after dinner. He stood before them with his pumps neatly side by side, his knickers jutting full to thick calves.

"Would you like to have a little fun tonight?" His voice was so low Marguerite scarcely heard him. It was a moment before she quite understood. Her heart began to thump. She took Zdenka's hand and tried to speak casually.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, Robert and I have a little champagne. You can come to his room when Old Eagle Eyes is snoring. Nothing could be simpler."

Marguerite and Zdenka looked at each other and pursed their lips airily.

"Come on, what about it? Think what a joke it would be on the others." He threw back his head and laughed. It was a rich heavy laugh that blew tobacco smoke toward them. Marguerite watched it curl in the air toward her face. "We won't hurt you, and a little champagne is just what the doctor ordered."

Zdenka squeezed Marguerite's hand. "And I lo-o-ove it."

"All right," said Marguerite. She laughed breathlessly, turning away from, but seeing him everywhere: seeing the round legs and the broad hands and hearing the rich laugh.

"Good. We'll expect you about twelve." Lifting one foot, he knocked his pipe against the heel of his pump. The tobacco glowed for a moment in the snow and then blackened. As he walked up the steps he tapped Marguerite's head with his knuckles. She felt his touch tingle.

When he had gone she stared at Zdenka without being able to speak. There was a sound behind her and she jumped, expecting to see Mademoiselle in her black dress and lace collar waiting in awful anger.

"We'll be expelled if she finds out," she whispered.

"Who? Mademoiselle? How could she find out?"

"Of course," said Marguerite weakly. She stood up. She was afraid to open the door, but she forced herself to turn the knob. The small lobby was close and dim, unexpectedly unchanged. Her heart leapt when she saw Robert at the desk, but he was writing in a ledger and did not look up as they passed. They skipped by the door of the brightly lighted dining-room where the cloths seemed to shine like snow and the longest table of all, glittering with silver and glass, was set for the girls of the *Pensionnat Les Hirondelles*. They did not make a sound on the carpeted stairs as they hurried up arm-in-arm, brushing against the framed edelweiss and Robert's father's war medals hanging dustily by their ribbons. They ran on tiptoe along the upstairs passage, and as they passed Mademoiselle's door they could hear her bath water running briskly. Their own door closed behind them with a comfortable slam and they leaned against it giggling and out of breath.

"It's too wonderful!" whispered Zdenka.

Marguerite fumbled for the light chain. "I want a bath up to my chin, and then I'll put perfume behind my ears and pinch my cheeks and brush my hair till it sparks." She jerked off her ski jacket and threw it at the ceiling.

At seven o'clock the dinner bell clanged through the sagging walls of the hotel. There was a clatter of opening doors and footsteps. Marguerite hurriedly licked her little finger tips and ran them over her eyebrows. She twirled in front of the mirror.

Zdenka stood in the doorway. "We'll be late," she said warningly.

The Germans were hurrying along the passage and down the stairs with noisy impatience. Marguerite and Zdenka edged in among them. They were clean and red-faced and blond and they smelt of the wind. They were too busy among themselves to notice the girls.

Marguerite and Zdenka, arm-in-arm, joined the others standing at Mademoiselle's door. She was waiting for them, her lips moving as she counted to be sure everyone was there.

Marguerite nudged Zdenka. "She forgot to shave," she whispered, turning so that Mademoiselle could not see her laughing. Zdenka put her hand over her mouth and bent down.

Jops leaned over Marguerite's shoulder. "What is it? What're you laughing at?"

"Mademoiselle forgot to shave!"

Jops gave a muffled shriek of delight and, as they pushed down the stairs after Mademoiselle, Marguerite could hear her telling the others. She wondered how she could stop laughing before she got to the dining-room.

As they walked to their table Marguerite stood on tiptoe to see if Maurice were already at his round one by the window. But it was empty, with the napkin still cocked and the glass upsidedown. Still better, she thought, for I shall see him walk past me. She gave her hips a swing to feel the pleats of her pink skirt swish against her legs.

The steaming food was brought into the dining-room by waitresses in white dresses with bare arms. Monsieur Stehle, Robert's father, stood at the swinging kitchen door nodding and smiling approvingly as the Germans heaped their forks high and Marguerite reluctantly passed the rolls to Mademoiselle first.

"And you pass them back down this side," she whispered to Pompi, pinching her thigh.

"Just for that I won't," said Pompi.

Then Zdenka nudged her and Marguerite saw Maurice walking past. He was there, miraculously, as if to say, Here I am when you had nearly forgotten me. He walked slowly, with his hands in the pockets of his knickers, and he was brown all over in lovely deep browns that melted into each other. He waved to the Germans, who answered loudly; and then he caught Marguerite's eye and winked. She pretended she did not see, but she felt her face redden. Ulla stared with blue pebbly eyes from across the table.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked suspiciously.

"Mam'selle, Mam'selle, I did a telemark!" shrieked Lili. "And then I fell in a plowed field. It was horrible." Her black eyes filled with tears.

"Really," said Mademoiselle, quite unperturbed. She shifted her cud of bread from one cheek to the other. She smiled up and down the table, patting Pompi's hand. "I had a very interesting talk with Monsieur Mermod this evening. He said you were all model pupils. Marguerite and Zdenka a little headstrong, perhaps." She smiled at them forgivingly. "But that is youth."

Scilla stood up and leaned over the table to reach the bread basket.

"Scilla! Such manners!" said Mademoiselle.

By looking between Scilla and Ulla, Marguerite could see Maurice heaping his fork with hearty mouthfuls. She turned to Zdenka and giggled.

Mademoiselle put down her fork and wiped her mouth carefully. The light shone cruelly upon her, thinning her greying hair and darkening her upper lip. "Monsieur Mermod has taught you a good many things," she said. "He's taught you how to get up, or at least how not to fall." She smiled at Pompi who looked back at her impassively. "And best of all, he's taught you how with courage to surmount the obstacles in your path." She leaned forward to be sure they were all paying attention. "You can see without my telling you that here is fine training for your journey through life."

Marguerite remembered the wide clean sweep of the mountainside and the dusk and the untouched snow. She was glad it was impossible to clutter them with words, like interlacing ski tracks on the snow's smooth surface. Mademoiselle could talk until morning, but her words would only fall into the air and be gone.

Scilla drummed her bitten fingernails on the tablecloth. She turned to Ulla. "When I get home I'm going to have a pound of butter at every meal."

"You must not be so frivolous," said Mademoiselle sternly.

One of the Germans got up with his glass of wine cradled in his fingers as though he were warming them. "Prosit!" he called. "Prosit!" The others picked up their glasses and laughed. A woman drooped her head on the shoulder of the man next to her. Marguerite saw the braids around her head gleam like freshly baked bread.

After dinner the Germans crowded into the sitting-room and sank into the creaking wicker armchairs. Mademoiselle and Pompi and Jops took the wooden chairs under the mounted chamois head in the lobby.

Marguerite and Zdenka tried to slip by.

"Marguerite, where are you going?" asked Mademoiselle sharply.

Marguerite jumped. "Just into the ballroom." She could not say that she was about to peep into the sitting-room to see if Maurice had taken his usual place at the card table.

"Very well," said Mademoiselle, "but I must know where you are. Now, Ulla, will you please get me a glass of *syrop de framboise*. I must have it for my digestion."

Marguerite took Zdenka's hand and ran with her to the ballroom. The chairs with their worn leather seats down one side of the room only made it seem more deserted. The girls did not speak until they were sitting on the steps of the platform where the pianist and accordionist played on Friday nights. A dull-faced clock was ticking sluggishly. Its hand pointed to eight.

"Four hours," sighed Marguerite. They stretched ahead like eternity. Then she leaned over and pushed the hair back from Zdenka's ear. "Have you ever been kissed?" she whispered.

Zdenka looked very surprised. "Why, yes, haven't you?"

"Have you *really?*" Marguerite stared at Zdenka who sat back as though she had said the most matter-of-fact thing in the world. She was wearing her best dress, as iridescent as a blue-bottle, and Marguerite had never seen her look so grown-up.

The Germans put a record on the gramophone in the sitting-room. There was a fanfare of violins, then a pause before a gusty soprano began to mingle with the Germans' deeper voices. *Zwei Herzen im drei Viertel Takt. . . .* The voice waltzed through the room to the step of the platform.

"Do listen," said Marguerite excitedly. "It's the song they play in the Kursaal." She remembered the clatter of tea things in the midst of the music, the delectable cakes on the wagon, the women in their furs and the thin dark violinist who was always sad. Then abruptly she remembered what Zdenka had said. "Oh, Zdenka, what does it feel like?"

"Well." But Zdenka put her chin in her hands and did not go on.

"Rita! Rita!" Lili ran into the ballroom. "There you are. I want you to look at my bruise. It's blood-red."

Marguerite shook herself impatiently. "Serves you right for going into a plowed field."

"Go away, we're busy," said Zdenka.

"You are not," said Lili. She stared at them sulkily.

Marguerite stood up. She could not sit still while the music was playing and so she waltzed across the room with her skirt in the tips of her fingers. She danced up to a faded mirror, hanging from clumps of antlers. She saw herself reflected dimly and the room behind her going as far back as though it stretched to the mountains. Under the beat of the music she seemed to hear the faintly scuffling feet of all the people who had danced to this music, the dainty laughter of the women in furs. When the dark violinist played, his long hand throbbed on the bow and his violin was tucked lovingly against his white cheek. She waltzed to the door and there she suddenly saw Ulla. Ulla marched up to her with her square heels clicking accusingly. "You two have something up your sleeve. Scilla said she saw you whispering in the bathroom."

"What if she did?" sang Marguerite, fitting the words to the music. She twirled over toward Zdenka and they burst out laughing. They laughed as if they had never heard anything funnier.

"It's none of your business," said Zdenka, gasping for breath.

Ulla stood uncertainly near the platform. Marguerite danced around her, but she stopped laughing because Ulla looked so tall and bony and she felt sorry for her. She wondered if Maurice was in the sitting-room. Behind Ulla the clock ticked sluggishly, but without altogether stopping.

"Come on and dance with me," Marguerite said to Ulla, holding out her arms but taking little steps backwards and forwards. Her feet would not stand still.

"Don't be silly," said Ulla. "What're you so excited about, anyway? Because we're going tomorrow?"

Marguerite laughed. She could not be frightened with that. "Come on, Zdenka. Come, come, come, Zdenka. Oh, why do you have such an unsingable name?"

Zdenka stood up and dusted her skirt. The waltzing voice was lost momentarily in a burst of laughter from the sitting-room and Marguerite thought she could hear Maurice, louder than the rest.

She and Zdenka put their arms around each other. With their feet gliding over the floor lightly they went spinning across the room, past the mirror where Marguerite looked to see them with their fine silk dresses and floating hair. She could feel Zdenka's soft, moving waist under her hand, and the air was heavy with Zdenka's musky perfume. The violins had taken up the soprano's melody and they were playing so sweetly that her throat tightened. She forgot they were alone; the room seemed to be full of dancing people. The music, the perfume, the deep mirror and the people were spinning around her. Her feet went faster and faster in tiny steps. Faster and faster.

"Girls! Girls!"

Marguerite stopped. Her hand fell from Zdenka's waist. She was dizzy and she did not at first see Mademoiselle standing in the doorway, leaning on her silver-knobbed cane.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," said Zdenka.

The music in the sitting-room stopped and someone picked up the needle so that it jarred against the record with a humiliating squawk.

Marguerite swallowed and nodded.

"I'm going up to my room," said Mademoiselle. "The others have gone already. You may stay down here if you wish until nine o'clock. I've told Monsieur Stehle to remind you if you fail to see the time for yourselves." She tapped her cane on the floor. "Lili, come here." She turned to go. Then she stopped and looked back. "What's the matter with you, Marguerite?"

"I've been dancing," said Marguerite weakly. She felt as if she had been jerked up from a deep sleep.

"I could see that," said Mademoiselle acidly. Lili trotted up and Mademoiselle took her by the arm. "Come along, child. I want to see that bruise. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mademoiselle."

Marguerite did not feel easy until the last slow step on the creaking stairs had died away. Then she was happy again. She did a little dance step over to the clock. It was still going.

"Let's go into the hall," said Ulla. "We can watch the Germans play cards."

The hall was empty now, and only dimly lighted by one unshaded bulb over the desk. The chamois stared from the shadows, as if he were listening to the laughter and chatter in the sitting-room.

Ulla peeped at the card players. She had to stand carefully behind the doorjamb so that the light would not fall on her. "Maurice is there," she whispered.

Marguerite tiptoed up to her. He was in his usual place. He had a glass of beer at one elbow and a hand full of cards. His pipe was clenched between his teeth. Robert hovered nearby, shaking his head to keep the limp hair out of his eyes.

"Has Maurice ever spoken to you?" asked Ulla.

Marguerite hesitated. "What if he has?"

"What an idea," said Zdenka. "Why should he speak to us, I'd like to know?" She prodded Marguerite in the ribs.

"He's a regular lady's man," said Ulla. "Look at the way he's ogling that German woman." She stared into the room intently, breathing through her mouth.

"Pooh," said Marguerite. But now she saw that the woman next to Maurice was glancing at him from the corners of her eyes and wrinkling her nose at him. It was the woman with the glossy braids. A string of amber beads wound several times around her neck caught the light and held it.

"She's a terrible flirt," said Zdenka. "She does that with them all. I've seen her."

"Just the same, I'll bet he's interested," said Ulla. "That's the way men are, you know. I've read about it often."

"Rubbish," said Marguerite, but she saw Maurice lean over and whisper something in the woman's ear. Then he took a long drink of beer and forgot to lick away the line of foam along his upper lip.

Ulla stretched and yawned. "Guess I'll go up to bed before Monsieur Stehle shoos me upstairs. Coming?"

"No," said Zdenka. "We'll come later." She took Marguerite's hand and led her over to the chairs under the chamois.

They watched Ulla go upstairs two steps at a time. Her footsteps died away along the passage. A door slammed.

"I suppose Ulla will always be an old maid," said Zdenka. "She's so terribly unattractive." She gave her lap a little pat.

"Um-m," murmured Marguerite. She leaned her head back against the nubbly carving of the chair until she could see the chamois' shy young throat curving out over her. She listened to the voices in the other room. One of them said, Guess it's pretty dull for you here in the winter, Maurice. His answer was jumbled as if he were talking around his pipe: I dunno. Sometimes we have a little excitement. It's a fine voice, she thought. Just the right kind of voice.

She looked up at the dull face of the grandfather clock behind the desk. It was ticking hoarsely. There was a rumble and it boomed the three-quarters, and then hawked. She wondered why all the clocks in the hotel were ill-tempered. But they must give up the minutes, however reluctantly they ticked, and sooner or later they would have to get to twelve o'clock.

"We can always drum up a little excitement when things are going slow," said Robert, in the sitting-room. He sniggered.

"That idiot!" said Zdenka. "I wouldn't look at him if I had any choice, but I can see with half an eye that Maurice likes you best." She fluffed her hair wistfully. "I suppose I'll have to sit on his lap."

Marguerite laughed and put her hand on Zdenka's shoulder. "Silly, who wants you to sit on his lap?"

"Robert will want me to sit on his lap when we get the champagne. Just as Maurice will want you to sit on his."

Marguerite sat up very straight. "But why should I sit on his lap? I don't want to sit on his lap. I hardly know him." She jumped out of her chair and hurried to the doorway. The braided lady was looking at Maurice with her head on one side.

"But if you talk about excitement you have to explain," she was saying.

Marguerite saw Maurice mop his forehead with a big soiled handkerchief and he looked as strange as if she had never seen him before. She turned back to Zdenka. "Why, we'll just drink champagne and talk. And then perhaps we'll give each other a souvenir. . . ." Her voice faded out as she looked back into the sitting-room. They were behaving as though there were no one in the world but themselves, in a brightly lighted room set out in the midst of the snow and the dark. She saw that they had pulled the curtains over the windows to keep the light from escaping. It shone down blindingly upon them from the clustered bulbs of the chandelier.

Maurice put his cards on the table, but Robert leaned over and picked them up. He shook his hair out of his eyes as he examined the cards with a worried frown.

"You've seen the little girls," said Maurice. With a gesture he made them sound very little: just tiny bits of fluff that one could easily overlook.

"Yes," said the woman archly. She picked up her beads and twisted them in her fingers.

The rest of the Germans laughed as if to say of course we know those silly little girls.

Marguerite beckoned wildly to Zdenka.

"Well," said Maurice, "Robert and I have a date with two of them tonight. A little champagne and a kiss, perhaps—or two." He smiled into the woman's eyes.

"Oh," said Zdenka.

The Germans laughed. One of them drained his glass of beer and then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "That's a good one. Why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

"Oh," said Robert, "there's no real harm in it, you understand."

"It gives them the thrill of their lives," said Maurice. "They'll dream about it for weeks."

He threw back his head and laughed, and as he did so Marguerite turned and ran up the stairs. Her breath was like a fist in her throat. As she ran down the passageway the white walls pressed in upon her. But his voice kept pace with her. She could not run fast enough to elude it.

SHIRLEY JACKSON

Behold the Child Among His Newborn Blisses

It was late on Saturday morning and the doctor's office was nearly empty. Two mothers sat quietly, one holding a little girl in a pink bonnet and dress, the other watching tolerantly while her little boy charged around the room, pulling a series of wooden ducks on wheels. From far within the doctor's office a baby screamed violently. Neither of the mothers paid the slightest attention. They had been waiting together for about fifteen minutes before the little girl on her mother's lap got the hiccups. Her mother blushed, patted the little girl's back, and finally turned her over onto her stomach on the couch. "Stay there, darling," she said, "and the nasty old hiccups will go away so quick you won't know you had them." She smiled at the other mother.

"They get them, don't they," the other mother said sympathetically.

"She gets them all the time," the little girl's mother said. "She just doesn't have a minute's peace with them."

"This one," the other mother gestured at the little boy, "he used to get them all the time, too."

"Terrible," the little girl's mother said.

"He outgrew them," the little boy's mother said, pleased.

The outer door opened and stayed open, letting in a draft. The little girl's mother, glaring at the doorway, picked up a pink sweater and threw it over the little girl, who was still lying on her stomach. The little boy's mother called: "Thomas, stay away from the door, dear, you'll catch your death of cold."

An enormous middle-aged woman backed in through the doorway, holding her hand out before her and calling "Come on, honey, come on into the nice office. Come on, Girlie honey."

"Would you mind closing that door?" the little girl's mother said angrily, "there are children in here."

"I've got to get him to come in, don't I?" the big woman said. "Just a minute." She began to snap her fingers, calling again, "Girlie honey, come on in—you've got to come in and see the nice doctor."

The little girl's mother looked at the little boy's mother, who shrugged and sighed. Then they both sat back furiously and watched their own children. The big woman was slowly backing into the room, still snapping her fingers and coaxing. Finally a boy of about ten appeared in the doorway, looking around watchfully and holding one hand behind him. Both the mothers smiled automatically; in the doctor's office it is manners to smile at someone else's children. The boy was reassured and came a step into the room. The big woman moved slowly forward and then caught him. "There," she said, "now you'll see, he isn't going to hurt you a bit."

"Would you *please* close that door?" the little girl's mother demanded.

The big woman said apologetically: "I just had to get him to come in. He's scared." She kicked the door shut. "He's never been to the doctor before."

"Never?" the little boy's mother asked incredulously.

"No." The big woman, still holding the boy, went over to an upholstered chair and sat down, putting the boy on her knee. He had one hand bandaged in a huge white handkerchief. "That's why he's scared, I guess."

"Hasn't he even had any whooping-cough inoculations?" the little girl's mother asked.

"Or diphtheria?" the little boy's mother added.

"Or his weight?" the little girl's mother insisted. "Don't you watch his weight?"

"He's good and healthy, he is," the big woman said. "He never needed to go to a doctor before."

The little boy on the floor had abandoned the ducks and was standing close to the big woman, watching the boy on her knee. They regarded one another steadily, almost without curiosity. "You want to get down?" the big woman said to the boy on her knee. "Girlie, you want down?" The boy shook his head. "I guess he's kind of shy of you at first," the big woman said to the little boy standing watching. "He doesn't always take to strangers right away."

The little boy's mother leaned forward. "Hello," she said to the boy, "aren't you a big boy?" The boy turned his eyes on her. "You're a *big* boy, aren't you?" she said. "Can't you talk to me?" He turned his eyes back to the little boy watching him, and the little boy's mother laughed embarrassedly. "I guess he is sort of shy," she said.

"He hardly ever talks anyway," the big woman said.

"How old is he?" the little girl's mother asked.

"He's ten, going on eleven."

"Ten," the little girl's mother repeated speculatively.

"*This* one," the little boy's mother said, "is five."

"Well," the big woman said. She turned to the boy on her knee. "This little man here is only five years old, Girlie. Imagine!"

"I'm five," the little boy said.

The boy on the big woman's knee stirred. "So'm I," he said.

The big woman laughed. "See," she said, "he can talk."

"Do you call him Girlie?" the little boy asked. "Is that boy's name Girlie?"

"It sure is," the big woman said, "it's Girlie all right."

"Why is his name Girlie? Is he a girl?"

The big woman laughed. "I'll tell you," she said, "when he was born he didn't cry a sound, and his old man said he couldn't be a real man, so quiet, and so that's why we call him Girlie."

"Is he a girl, though?" the little boy persisted.

The big woman laughed again. "I guess he doesn't know himself, sometimes," she said. "Do you, Girlie?"

Girlie moved suddenly. He twisted out of the big woman's arms and charged at the little boy, knocking him down. "Girlie," he said. "Boy."

The little boy began to cry even before his mother reached him and snatched him up. "Well!" she said, "a big boy like that!"

"Good lord!" the little girl's mother said, horrified. "A terrible thing to do!"

The little boy's mother turned on Girlie, who stood in the middle of the floor grinning hopefully. "You bad bad boy," she said. "You awful boy!"

"Play," Girlie said, "play with Girlie."

"Can't you even say you're sorry?" the little boy's mother said, and she turned to the big woman. "Doesn't he even say he's sorry when he does a thing like that?"

"Now wait a minute," the big woman said soothingly, "Girlie didn't mean to hurt the little fellow. He just wanted to play. I guess he's just about as sorry as anybody, and he didn't mean to do anyone any harm or start any fuss. He's a good boy, Girlie is."

"Well, he shouldn't do a thing like that to a child littler than he is," the little boy's mother said.

"Good heavens no!" the little girl's mother said. "First thing you know he'd do the same thing to *anyone,* babies even." She picked up the little girl and held her protectingly on her lap, and the little girl hiccuped reproachfully.

"Girlie," the big woman said. He turned to her. "Now you shouldn't have done that, Girlie. That was dirty, Girlie, *dirty*. That was a dirty thing to do, *dirty*."

Girlie hung his head. "Dirty," he said.

"There," the big woman turned to the little boy's mother. "Now he's sorry. He knows now it was bad."

"Well, he should learn to behave better with children littler than he is," the little boy's mother said. She took the little boy and went across the room to a chair near the little girl's mother. "Did you ever!" she said.

"Never!" the little girl's mother said.

"Thomas dear," the little boy's mother said loudly, "are you all right now? Did he hurt you badly, darling?"

Thomas had stopped crying and was looking at Girlie. He squirmed. "I want to go play with that Girlie boy, Mother," he said.

"Thomas!" his mother said. Thomas wriggled out of her arms and stood on the floor. "Stay over here, dear," she said.

Thomas looked at Girlie. "Hello, Girlie," he said. "Come on and play with these chickens."

"Ducks, dear," his mother said. She hesitated and then smiled condescendingly on the big woman.

"Ducks," Thomas said. He picked up the string attached to the ducks on wheels. "Look at me, Girlie," he said, "look at me pull the ducks."

"Ducks," Girlie said questioningly. He looked at the big woman. "Ducks?" he repeated.

"Sure," the big woman said. "Those are ducks, Girlie."

"Ducks," Girlie said.

"How old did you say he was?" the little girl's mother asked the big woman.

"Ten going on eleven," the big woman said. "He's a good boy."

"*This* one never cries," the little boy's mother said. "He's happy as a lark, the whole day long. Except when he's hurt, of course," she added reflectively.

"You say he's *never* been to the doctor before?" the little girl's mother asked.

"Hasn't ever needed to go to a doctor," the big woman said. "Now, though, he's got something wrong with his hand."

"Thomas," the little boy's mother said instantly, "come back over here, dear."

"He cut it on something," the big woman said. "It's been paining him."

The door to the doctor's office opened and a woman came out carrying the baby that had been screaming. She smiled miserably at the other mothers and went to the chair where she had left the baby's coat and hat. When she set the baby down it stopped screaming and, fist in its mouth, looked at the other children.

"Poor darling," the little girl's mother said. "Injection?"

The baby's mother nodded. "Third," she said. "Whooping cough."

"Terrible," the little girl's mother said. "We've had ours. Boy or girl?"

"Girl," the baby's mother said.

"This too," the little girl's mother said. "How old?"

"Twenty-seven weeks," the baby's mother said. "Yours?"

"Thirty-five," the little girl's mother said.

"Oh." The baby's mother smiled commiseratingly. "Almost time for the diphtheria."

"Next visit," the little girl's mother said. "Creep yet?"

"Up on her hands and knees," the baby's mother said. She had the baby dressed by that time and had picked up her own coat. "Well," she said. "Sorry for the noise."

"That's all right," the little girl's mother said.

"Too bad," the little boy's mother said.

"They all yell," the big woman said.

The baby's mother gave her a startled look and went out, carrying the baby carefully.

The doctor appeared in the office door. "Well," he said, smiling broadly, "if it isn't Thomas; how are you, little man?"

"Say hello to the doctor, Thomas," the little boy's mother said.

"Hello," Thomas said, but the doctor was looking at the little girl. "Coming along fine, I see," he said. "Well, who's next?"

The little girl's mother looked at the little boy's mother. "I guess she is," the little boy's mother said, pointing at the big woman.

"Oh, no," the big woman said, "you two were here—"

"Go ahead," the little girl's mother said, "I've got to wait here for my husband anyway."

"We're in no hurry at all," the little boy's mother said. "You go right on in."

"Well, then," the big woman said. She reached out suddenly and grabbed Girlie's arm. "Come along, Girlie."

"Well," the doctor said, looking down at Girlie, "what seems to be the matter with this fine young man?"

He disappeared into his office. The big woman hesitated in the doorway, wanting to speak to the two other mothers, who were watching their children again. "Look," the big woman said slowly, "he's a good boy, Girlie. He's a good boy," she went on earnestly, turning to the little girl's mother. "He's not awfully bright, this Girlie isn't, but he's a *good* boy."

The door closed behind her. The little girl's mother put the little girl back down on the couch. "Those nasty old hiccups are all gone at last," she said.

The little boy's mother did not look up. She was staring at her son. "Thomas," she said. He turned. "Come here, dear," she said.

Thomas walked over to his mother, pulling the ducks on the string.

"And the way that creature *stared* at those ducks," the little girl's mother said, "and keeping the door open all that time."

"Thomas," the little boy's mother said softly, "do you know what you were playing with? Do you know what Mother had to sit here and watch you playing with? Do you know that boy was an idiot?"

"No," Thomas said.

"Do you know what an idiot is, Thomas?" the little boy's mother almost whispered. "Do you know what you were playing with?"

Thomas was watching his mother curiously. Her lips were tight and she was breathing quickly. "You heard what his own mother said about him?" she demanded, her voice rising.

Thomas shook his head. Because he was not expecting punishment his mother's slap caught him sharply in the face. Afraid even to cry, he still stood staring.

"His own mother said he was dirty, that's what she said he was," the little boy's mother said. "This lady here heard his own mother say he was dirty and she saw you playing with him right in front of your mother. A dirty little idiot!"

The little girl's mother had turned her eyes down to her own daughter and was playing with a ruffle on the pink dress. Thomas looked at her quickly and back at his mother. Then he began to cry.

HELEN WOLFERT

In the Library

The air in the library is a husky place.
Within the doors the passersby
Stop for a moment's dull relief.
The sun pours down like blood of beef.
They stand with fans, they hold their feet
Flat to the cold of the entrance stones.
They chat their curses at the heat.
Heat jams the curses in their throats.
Heat crowds the marrow of their bones.
They chat and try the moment's grace:
She soaks the water from her face,
He waves his palms and slaps them dry.
They shake the heat out of their coats.
Heat crowds the marrow of their bones.
Heat fills the alley of their throats.

Jenny comes by them unaware,
Hop-skip to the children's line.
Body after body, face after face,
Three-five-seven-nine-
The line is short, the wait is brief.
The air in the library is a husky place.
The dahlia stands polite and prim.
In the reading room, like a sound, like a blare,
A dahlia stands with its beauty on.
The sun comes gold through the green leaf.
Ben Chaim's son he sits in a chair
With a dahlia flower right next to him.
Ben Chaim, the ragpicker, had a son
And the son sat in a library chair.
And here they are, the son and chair:
One of them is Ezekiel Kahn.
And then another child walks in,
Another child walks out, walks in,
The dahlia stands with its beauty on.
A drawl of gold, a yawn of gold
Is like sleep on the books and the sun is a lace
Of yellow holes in a dust motif.
The sun, the burning tin, the brass,
The sun is soft as it drains down
The unwashed panes, the old,
The long, the up-to-the-ceiling window glass.
The husky air swoons about.
A dahlia stands in gold regalia,
Its petals in metals as sure as a crown.
Quietly, vertically, through her hair,
A girl cries into a book of grief.
And Ezekiel Kahn sits in his chair,
Son of Solomon, Ben Chaim Kahn,
Grandson of Rabbi Chaim Kahn,
Great-grandson of Rabbi Ezekiel Kahn,
Who sprang from Rabbi Solomon Kahn.
Endlessly backward, on and on,
By rabbis gone and never gone,
By Ezekiel, Chaim, Solomon,
Inhabited is Ezekiel Kahn.

The sun comes gold through the green leaf,
And then another child comes in.
Another child walks out, walks in.
Jenny is still, her eyes are leveled.
Her hand goes out to the golden dahlia.
But 'only the brave deserve the fair'
And Jenny's hand does not dare.
The dahlia stands like a harlequin,
Gilt, rosetted, undisheveled,
Without the blotch of ecstasy,
Without the excellence of sin.
Jenny is still. Her eyes are leveled.
Only her hand moves, toward and away.
We say, "These petals are too many,
Are too precise, are too pale."
We can complain of petals, but Jenny?
Not Jenny. Not she.
Only her hand moves, toward and away.
Like the skin of the Talmud is Ezekiel's skin,
An old parchment alive in a chair,
Staring and burning under his hair.
His hair is the hair of Palestine,
Olives, rams and the black wine.
But Ezekiel studies and he does not pray.
He is a rabbi and he is not a rabbi; the wail
Of the Lord of Hosts washes down
Through the windows together with the sun,
"Ezekiel, why hast thou forsaken me?"
Ezekiel Kahn, the great forsaker,
And who do you think he be?
The rabbi, the rabbi and the rabbi-maker—
Turn them out, knaves all three.
"No Zeki, we won't get out,
We won't, we won't, we won't get out.
No, Zeki, we won't get out,
We won't get out today."
Freud and Kant, turn them out!
Marx and Darwin, turn them out!—
The dust and the sunlight mix in doubt.

Another child walks out, walks in.
Can a flower be called unbeautiful?
Is it bright, is it light, is it wild, is it dull?
Who asks? Who asks? Jenny's hand
Pulls out and in like a rubber band.
And Ezekiel Kahn sits in his chair.
The sun in sloth lulls through the air.
Another child walks out, walks in.
High up and far away,
And caught, and closed round in a cup,
That is beauty and one's ration
Is a moment at it with eye and hand.
Up and back, and again, up
And back in the earthy and earthless passion,
Up and back. And Ezekiel Kahn
Sits in his chair and does not see.
The children come, the children go.
The air is loud, a dahlia sings.
This is the man, this is he
Who thinks and does not hear or see,
Who thinks because he does not know
How others do the other things.
Ezekiel, the oracle, rabbinical, pale,
Endless in the endless synagogue,
He has been here before, he has lived here before.
In Gerona, Saragossa, Oporto, in Prague,
He has been wise and without callouses on his hands.
He has carried no axe or ram,
He has held no hoe or hook,
But endless in the endless synagogue
Of Egypt, Russia, Portugal,
In Cracow, in Warsaw, in Amsterdam,
Above the people, the rabbi with the book,
Ezekiel, ethereal, ineffable, pale.
For the world was Beauty and Beast, for the world was Heaven and Chore,
For the world was Book and Burden, for the world was he and they,
And he still sits in his chair today.

And yet, not separate,
But of one stuff and in one space
It throbbed as one, they and he:
The knobbed hand, the knotted nail,
The veined foot, the gnarled thigh,
The stump trunk like a chopped-off tree,
And above the head, and the wan face
With the historical peace shut in it,
And wisdom in bloom and the papal eye.
But this place is new, this husky place,
And it's a new flower from today's bough
That this catlike girl purrs upon.
The past lies dead and this and now
Say Ezekiel Kahn is Ezekiel Kahn;
And none shall burn him in the synagogue,
For he is no candle, votive-dim,
And dark with love and waxen white,
Nor in the candle's fog and clog
Shall any feel themselves at one with him,
Melted and melting and dripping at the brim
Under the elemental light.
The air in the library is a husky place.
Within the doors the passersby
Clutter and cluster unrelieved.
The peace floats. Jenny's hand
Pulls out and in like a rubber band.
Then snap! the cord of innocence goes snap!
And Jenny stands there self-perceived,
A ribbon of rubber limp in the air.
She surrenders the flower, her hand is alone.
She creeps for revival—she does not look.
Her hand creeps out and finds a book.
There is a dark corner, she need not look.
But secretly she moves to the dark with the book,
And slyly she bends downward over the book,
And deeply she bends inward into the book,
To the farthest, remotest remove of the book,
Safe in that sunless, flowerless zone.
The sun drops in a single slant
Encompassing the dust, Ezekiel and Kant.

Outside the shaft of sun upon the table
Mottled with dusks and shimmers and blots,
Lie Thomas, Bergson, Mann and Browder.
Outside the shaft of life run the old,
The rabbis of gold, the divinities,
On whose table Joseph Karo lay,
And the book of Joseph, and Cain and Abel,
And Moses and Moses Maimonides,
Solomon Ganzfried and the book of Babel,
The handbooks of reality, the way
Of life, the Word for all to hear it
Who conceived their rabbi with aspiring blood,
Who labored as mother manifold
To bear one and to grow one
And on their sinews to push him up to God.
Then, though he was what they had given,
They knew his mind as the almost spirit;
They knew his books as the under heaven.
The shadows fall in dusks and blots.
The sun in sloth lulls through the air.
And this is the last rabbi, through his bones
Sifts the ache of the ages; through
This tin and chromium rabbi with his chowder
Of modern thought in his aluminum pots
From which he serves no one.
The sun falls in a silken slant
On Freud and Mann, on Marx and Browder.
In a tenderness of silver, in a mightiness of gold
The tablets were tabernacled, the stones
Of Moses; but this is chromium, Darwin and Kant—
Can, can't, du kannst, er kann,
Genghis Khan, Kublai Khan,
And Ezekiel, Ezekiel, Ezekiel Kahn
Sitting forever in a library chair.
The sun slips soft like dew.
Silence! He reads for read he must.
And Jenny nests in the hum of the dust.

CARL RUTHVEN OFFORD

Low Sky

Now where the hell was Tina? What was she up to?

Blackie sat up on the tenement steps and craned his neck so that he could see down the block. He saw Tina. She was sitting on the curb, a few houses down the block. From where Blackie sat he couldn't see what she was playing with on the curb. He saw her little head bobbing up and down, and her small hands rising and falling in the rhythm of her bobbing head. Satisfied, Blackie leaned his body back against the steps in a big, relaxed sprawl.

Overhead, the sun was caught up in a blanket of grey, muggy clouds. There wasn't much sunlight but the day was hot and muggy. Blackie shut his eyes, blotting out the mass of grey sky, blotting out the row of dingy tenements across the street. After a while he heard the old janitor coming up the wooden basement steps, slowly, heavily, then he heard the roll of a garbage can as the janitor wheeled it onto the sidewalk.

His eyes shut, Blackie heard the janitor making trip after trip; and he heard the pushcart peddlers farther down the block as they shouted to people to buy their wilted string beans, their over-ripe tomatoes that sweltered in the heat of the open carts. Added to the noises of the block was the noisy squishing of the buses as they sped past on Lenox Avenue. Blackie lay there, the sounds droning in his ears, then he heard a loud sigh from the old janitor and he guessed it was a sign that the last can was up on the sidewalk.

Blackie opened one eye, only partly, and focused it on the janitor. The old man stood over the row of cans, breathing heavily, pulling the ragged end of his dirty workshirt across his face. The old man was ringing wet, the sweat sticking his shirt flat against his frail-looking chest. Blackie shifted his narrowed gaze to the cans and to himself he counted them. Nine cans in all the old man had brought up. Nine belly-dented cans, blackened with splotches of congealed grime. Blackie shut his eyes with tight disgust. It seemed that looking at the sweating old man and the grimy cans made him feel the humidity all the more. He turned his head a little, away from the man and the cans, and he felt the hard, dusty step cold and pleasant-shocking against his neck.

He lay there, almost motionless, his dirty white handkerchief crumpled limply on his thigh. After a minute he reached blindly for the handkerchief and mopped the beady perspiration from his broad forehead. Then he heard the old janitor shuffling over to him.

"Say Blackie! This ain' no way to lay up on the stoop. People's got to pass in and out."

Blackie cracked an eye open, then he shut it again. He didn't answer. He didn't move.

"You hear me, Blackie? I say. . . ."

"To hell with what you say," Blackie growled. He didn't open his eyes.

The old man stood there looking at Blackie's big sprawled body. He scratched his pointed, wrinkled chin and finally he said, "This ain' no place to lay down, Blackie. You paying for a room inside."

"Go to hell," Blackie growled. "Mind your damn business."

For a second there was silence, then Blackie heard the old man shuffling away. He opened his eyes and looked on the slightly humped back of the old man, then he sat up again and looked down the block. Tina was still there, sitting at the curb. Blackie yawned, stretching out his big arms. His eyes went up to the cloudy sky. It looked like rain all right, he thought. He hoped to Jesus it would rain good and hard. Anything to break the heat, he thought. Once more he glanced down the block at Tina, then turning to one side he scratched the seat of his dirty pants, leisurely and luxuriously, before he stretched out again.

From the open hallway behind him a draft of warm, moldy-smelling air brushed against his damp face. He lay there, hearing the sounds about him, feeling the moist, close heat as though it were a heavy, suffocating rug. Presently a sluggish drowsiness began to steal over him. Despite the hard edges of the brownstone steps that seemed to cut into his muscular back, he began to doze. Suddenly there was a crash, followed by the angry, barking voice of the old janitor.

"Tina! C'mon back you li'l bastard!"

Blackie jerked himself upright. He caught a glimpse of Tina's brown legs as she scurried for cover behind a pushcart. One of the garbage cans lay overturned and rocking on its dented belly, its insides spewed about on the sidewalk. The old man stood beside the overturned can, cursing and shaking his withered fist in the general direction of Tina whom he couldn't see. Watching the sweating old man and watching the garbage can as it slim-slammed to and fro on its belly, Blackie broke out in a slow grin. The grin vanished as the old man started over to him, his small, big-veined fist still doubled in anger.

"You got to do sump'n, 'bout Tina, Blackie! You seen what she went and done!" He stopped about a foot in front of Blackie and his doubled fist released a thin, pointing finger. "You got to do sump'n, Blackie!"

"I ain' seen nothing," Blackie answered coldly.

The old man swung and pointed to the mess on the sidewalk.

"There's what she done!"

"How I know it's Tina what done it?"

The old man swallowed as though downing a lump in his throat. His little eyes stared big at Blackie, then he resolutely dropped his pointing hand. "Where's Cora at?"

"None of your damn business." Blackie stared coldly at the small, wrinkled face in front of him. "You don't have to ask after Cora. I'm the one to see."

"You ain' her father," the old man said, speaking slowly now, his lips seeming to tremble as he spoke. "You ain' nothing to her," he added with slow venom.

A man dressed in gray summer slacks and a cream sports shirt came out from the adjoining tenement; he stopped and looked at Blackie and the old janitor. Blackie glanced swiftly at the man, then back to the janitor.

"Beat it," Blackie said softly. "Beat it before I get sore."

"I want to see Cora," the old man said. He started forward. Blackie stood up and blocked his path.

"Make one damn step more and I knock the hell out of you."

The old man remained where he stood, one foot planted on the bottom step. Sweat covered his dark face as he stared up at Blackie.

"Take it easy, Pops," the man in summer slacks said. "It's too damn hot anyway."

The old man stood looking up at Blackie, his little eyes glistening as if they brimmed with tears. "You going to get it, Blackie," he warned, and now there was a tremble in his voice. "Some day somebody's going to give it to you. If I wasn't so old I'd show you sump'n."

Blackie said nothing. The old man turned away slowly and went over to the can and began to pick up strewn garbage. The man from the adjoining stoop came over to Blackie.

"What the hell's the matter with Pops today?"

"The heat's got him," Blackie said.

The man grinned and slapped the palm of his hand against the thick cement post that braced the steps. "Well . . . playing anything?"

Blackie dug into his pants pocket. "Put in 782 for a dime."

The man pocketed the dime. "Hope you got it today. You been keeping that number in a long time, ain't you?"

"It'd better jump out today," Blackie said. "Tina ain't got no shoes. The school's going to open next week."

"How you stand with the Snatch Board?"

"I got my 1A," Blackie said. "Ain' going to be long now. How you making out?"

"Still 3A. They ain' taking nobody with kids yet. How's Cora?"

"She ain' so well. Some kind of cough's got her. Couldn't make it to the Bronx today. She's in the bed."

Two cops on horseback appeared on the block and they fell silent. In the silence of awe they held their talk as the cantering horses approached, the blue-coated riders heaving up and down. When the cops had passed they still stared at the beet-red necks and the heaving blue jackets.

"Harlem's a killer for cops these days," the man said. "We've got more cops than the whole of the whole damn city."

"You got to watch out you don't get pick' up with them Numbers," Blackie said. "Things are getting tight."

"They ain' paying me no mind," the man said. "They got the mugging scare on. That's all it is."

"See they don't pick you up when 782 come out. I don't want no mess out of you when that number come out."

The man grinned. "Don't worry, Jack. I've got protection." He started to move off up the block. "I'll be digging you. See you later."

Blackie watched after him for a moment, then turned and searched the block for Tina. He saw the old janitor standing at the entrance to the basement steps but he didn't see Tina. His eyes searched among the pushcarts and among the stacks of garbage cans on the sidewalk across the street. He funneled his hand to his mouth.

"Tinaaa!" he called. He waited a moment, hearing his voice hum through the heavy air. Then again,

"Tina!"

"Yeahhh, Blackie!"

Tina's shrill voice came out of the sky. Blackie looked up. A pall of thickening darkness stretched across the low sky.

"Where you at?" he shouted.

"Heeere, Blackie!"

He followed the wailing sound of her thin voice and now he saw her on the tenement roof across the street. She was stretched out on the flat roof, her small head hanging over the edge to the street.

"Get to hell down!" Blackie shouted. "Come on down here!"

The small neck craned farther out over the edge, then her arm swung over to the street below.

"Watch out, Tina!" Blackie shouted. "Get to hell down from there!"

The small, unsupported head shook from side to side and the tiny hand pointed to the old janitor in the basement entrance.

"Pay him no damn mind!" Blackie shouted. "Come to hell down off of there! You hear me?"

Tina's small head nodded in jerks, then it disappeared as she withdrew. Blackie stood staring at the roof but all he could see now was a lonely clothesline with women's stockings and a man's long underwear that hung stiff and chalky in the gathering darkness.

In a minute she came bounding out of the dark hallway. She raced across the street and up to Blackie, her eyes glittering, her thin brown face shining with sweat.

"Want me, Blackie?" She stood in a position so that Blackie's big body shielded her from the eyes of the old janitor in the basement entrance.

"What you think I called you for?" Blackie looked steadily at her upturned face. Tina was a goddam blip, he thought to himself as he gazed on her. She was a little, big-eyed, goddam blip! He wondered why he cared so much about her. She wasn't his kid but that made no difference in the way he felt about her. He sighed and sat down on the steps. Tina instantly sat down, locking her knees in her small arms and leaning back so that Blackie's body covered hers from the sight of the old janitor.

"Didn't I tell you to stay off them roofs?"

Tina shifted her eyes to the sidewalk.

"Ain' our own roof big enough?"

Tina remained silent.

"How come you scared of Pops?"

Now she looked at Blackie, her eyes going wide, then shifting uneasily. "I ain' scared of Pops," she answered softly.

"Don't lie to me. You know damn well you're scared of him."

Tina said nothing now, but Blackie noticed her small bottom lip swelling out in anger. He grabbed her slender arms and shook her violently. "You ain' to be scared of nobody, see! Pops nor nobody, see!" He released her roughly and stared at her. Tina looked down. Her little shoulders began to shake, then tears silently trickled down her sweating face. Blackie abruptly looked away. He didn't want her to cry, but what the hell! He didn't want her to be scared of Pops either! Without looking at her he said, "What the hell you're crying for? Did I hit you?"

Tina said nothing. She kept staring down at the sidewalk and the tears coursed down her cheeks. Blackie passed her his limp dirty handkerchief.

"Wipe your face and stop crying."

Tina held the handkerchief loosely in her hand. Blackie took it from her and held the back of her head in one hand and mopped the tears from her face. "Did I ever raise my hand at you?"

Tina looked up at him and the wetness of her eyes stabbed hard at Blackie. He hated like hell to see her crying.

"You know how I feel about you, don't you? You know I'm always looking out for you, don't you?"

Tina said nothing, but he could tell she was beginning to feel all right. Her reddish eyes blinked over and over and he knew that that was the end of her crying.

"Did I ever hit you . . . don't care what you done?"

Tina shook her small head.

"Then there ain' nothing to cry for." He dug into his pocket and gave her a penny. "Go get some candy and come on right back. Don't let the rain ketch you."

Tina got up slowly. She wiped her hand across her eyes, then she looked beyond Blackie to the old janitor. He was standing there, his back turned to them.

"Go on," Blackie said. "Go on and come on back before the rain."

She moved off hesitantly. Blackie watched her, noticing that she cut a path close to the curb, as far as possible from the old janitor. As soon as she'd passed the janitor she broke into a run and Blackie watched her until she turned the corner at the end of the block.

She sure is a blip, Blackie thought. She's got more hell in her than a dozen alley cats. A rumble of thunder sounded overhead and he looked up. The sky was a drooping mass of heavy clouds. In a minute there was another heavy roll, followed by a streak of lightning. People on the sidewalk were hurrying along now and the pushcart peddlers were hastily slinging canvas covers over their fruit and vegetables. Blackie focused his eyes on the corner. Tina should be back by now, he thought. Thunder rolled again, light and far-off sounding, then a drizzle fell.

The light drizzle cloaked the tenements in a veil of mist and marked the dusty sidewalk with little poxlike dots. It came down on Blackie's head and sprayed his face. He sat there in the filmy drizzle, waiting for Tina, and all of a sudden the block was filled with a running commotion.

"Beat it, gal! Beat it!"

"Don't let him ketch you!"

Blackie saw Tina racing down the block, screaming in terror. Close at her heels was a white man in a white, linen coat. Behind them a handful of shouting men and women formed a running semi-circle.

"Duck in the hallway, gal!"

"Don't let him ketch you!"

Tina threw herself at Blackie's feet. Screaming, she locked herself around his legs. The white man skidded to a stop; the handful of excited Negroes grew into a crowd and ringed them in. The white man stuck a broken doll in Blackie's face.

"She broke it, mister. Broke it and ran out of the store."

Blackie ignored the man. He looked down at Tina.

"Come on, Tina. Get on up and stop your screaming."

The white man pushed the doll closer in Blackie's face.

"Hey, mister! Look what she did! She broke it! It'll cost you sixty-nine cents!"

A deep hush fell upon the crowd. Blackie eyed the doll. It had red cheeks and red lips and red, matty hair, and it had two blue beads for eyes. It was broken at the neck and as the man held it up sawdust oozed out of the head like fine brown sugar. Blackie looked at the white man's long, bony face behind the swinging legs of the doll. The man was breathing hard and his long, thin nose was sprinkled wet with the drizzle.

"Come on, Tina," Blackie said. "Get out the rain." He stooped and lifted her in his arms.

"Hey!" the white man said.

"You got to forget about it, mister," Blackie said. "She might of done it, but done it or not I ain' got no sixty-nine cents. I ain' seen sixty-nine cents in days."

He turned and bore Tina up the steps. The white man leaped up the steps, two at a time. The crowd surged in excitedly, unmindful of the drizzle. Blackie set Tina down in the entrance of the hallway and turned to the white man.

"What the hell you're doing up here?"

"You've got to make good on the damage," the man said. His voice was raspy and his thin long face was very pale. "Your child broke it and ran out."

"That nigger ain' got no child!" a voice in the crowd barked. Blackie recognized the voice of the old janitor and he tried to search him out. "That nigger ain' got no child!" Blackie saw the old man now, his veiny, withered hand pointing. "He ain' the father!"

The white man looked from Blackie to the old janitor in the crowd.

"Who's the father?" he demanded. "Somebody's got to make good."

"He ain' the father!" the old man shouted, and suddenly from the crowd a fist shot out and landed on his wrinkled neck. Blackie saw the old man stagger, then he became lost in the swaying movement of the crowd. Overhead, thunder rolled across the wet sky with a muffled sound. The white man turned his eyes from Blackie to the crowd down below.

"Whoever's in charge got to pay for the doll," he said stubbornly. "It ain't my store. I'm only the manager." He peered beyond Blackie to Tina. "Where you live, girl?"

Blackie stiffened. His big fists doubled and suddenly his arm shot back. "Get to hell out of here, white man!" The man jumped back. He missed his footing on the wet steps and went reeling. He fell to the sidewalk and for an instant he lay motionless, then dazedly he began to sit up.

"The cops!" somebody shouted, and instantly there was a mad, panicky dash for cover.

"Beat it, Blackie!"

"Don't be no fool! Beat it!"

Blackie saw the rushing blue coats, the night sticks, the big, beefy faces. There were two of them. "C'mon," he said to Tina.

They sped down the dim, narrow stretch of hallway, Tina's feet beating a light, patty rhythm, Blackie's weight pounding heavy and drawing squeaks from the rotten boards. He grabbed Tina for a second as they reached the door. "Keep your mouth quiet now. Cora's sleeping."

It was dark inside the room. Blackie struck a match and looked off to the corner where a pale ray of light strained through the tiny window that opened onto an air-shaft. Below the window he could make out parts of the tall iron bed.

"That you, Blackie?"

The voice was husky with sleep. Blackie blew out the match.

"That you, Blackie? Where's Tina?"

"Tina's here. You better sleep. How you feeling?"

"I'm all right." She sighed tiredly in the darkness. "I'll be out tomorrow." She coughed and the bed creaked to the shaking of her body.

Blackie tiptoed across the small room to the door. He doubled his body in a stoop and listened. He heard a movement of people entering the hallway. The cops, he thought. Tina came over to where he stooped in the dark and he shooed her away. She retreated a few small steps and stood there in the darkness. Blackie heard the footsteps in the hallway coming toward his door. He got up and streaked past Tina to the bed where Cora lay. Suddenly a nightstick banged upon the door. Blackie clapped a hand over Cora's mouth.

"Quiet, honey. It's the cops."

Again the nightstick came down on the door. Tina ran across the room and threw herself on the bed. The bed made a creaking noise.

"Quiet," Blackie whispered.

There was a moment of silence outside, then the voice of a cop sounded. "Okay! Upstairs!"

Blackie heard the trooping of feet as the cops moved away and started up the stairs.

"Good Lord!" Cora said. "What the cops want?"

Blackie said nothing.

"What Tina done now?"

"Ain' Tina," Blackie whispered. "It's me."

"What you done? What they want with you?"

"I didn't do nothing. The white man fall and break his own ass. I didn't even touch him."

"Good Lord!" Cora breathed. "Them cops crazy these days. If they ketch you they'll beat you up. They'll kill you, Blackie."

"Quiet," Blackie said.

Above the faint-sounding thuds of the nightstick upstairs he heard the shuffle of feet entering the hallway. Something about that shuffle drove a bolt of fear into Blackie. Presently he heard the barking voice of the old janitor.

"What you-all want up there? He ain' up there!"

Blackie heard the trooping feet of the cops as they came back down the stairs.

"Who the hell are you?"

"I'm the janitor of this place."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," Blackie heard the janitor answer.

"Where's the kid live?"

"What kid?"

Blackie crept over to the door and listened hard.

"The kid with the guy named Blackie!" the cop boomed.

"Blackie ain' got no kid."

"What the hell you mean by that? Don't Blackie and the kid live here?"

"Naw. It's been weeks since Blackie moved out of here."

Standing behind the door Blackie felt the sweat breaking on him in rivers.

"He ain't living here?"

"Naw. He moved across the street some place."

"Didn't he run in here with the kid?"

"I don't know that. I didn't see him. If he run in here there ain' no place for him to go."

"Why in hell you didn't open your mouth before? Didn't you see us searching the goddam place?"

The old man's voice was suddenly soft against the anger of the cop and Blackie couldn't hear what he answered. There was a second's pause, then Blackie heard the cops trooping out through the hallway. He listened to their steps, and suddenly he felt very weak, as if all his strength were draining out through his legs. He squatted down on the floor, his broad shoulders going back against the door.

"They gone?" Cora whispered.

Blackie wiped an arm across his sweating forehead and called to Tina softly.

"Come here, Tina."

She came over in the darkness and stood in front of him.

"Don't you bother Pops no more," Blackie said. "You hear me?"

Tina nodded.

"I mean that," Blackie said. "If you bother Pops again I'll whip the hell out of you. You hear me? And I mean that, see!"

From the bed Cora said, "What you telling the child, Blackie?"

"Nothing," Blackie answered. "You better get some sleep."

LEONARD WALLACE ROBINSON

Trouble Keeping Quiet

It was after four o'clock in the morning and the two colored men came along Twenty-third Street, stepping right out and talking with all their energy in spite of the heat which would not be cooled even by the heavy morning dew. They were both going home now, a little drunk, having, after finishing their work at the dock, gone into one of the riverfront saloons and had several beers apiece. One was bareheaded, about fifty years' old and he wore a mustache and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses and the other, much younger, had a cap on with a crown so high and wide that it covered the vizor completely. They kept up their rapid pace along the street, crossing four avenues, and then, imperceptibly they began to slow down, both in pace and in talk. Finally, after a brief silence, the man with the glasses fished through his overall pockets and tapped his blue shirt pocket.

"I'm outa smokes," he said. "You got a cigarette?"

"No," said the other man, "we been smokin' yours."

"That's what I thought," said the man with the glasses. "How about you loosen now and get us some cigarettes." He pointed his finger at his friend and grinned, "*You* payin' for them this time."

"You know," said the other man, "you is a genius for good ideas, the only thing is being I ain't got one damned red cent only a nickel for the subway."

"Well ain't that too bad for me," said the man with the glasses. "I guess that means I'm Mr. Pay again." He fished in his overall pockets and took out four dimes. "Only *where* in hell we get a cigarette down here unless we wait till we get up Harlem."

"I seen this one place open all night up here between Eighth and Seventh and I guess they got a machine," said his friend.

"I like the way you know these places," the man with the glasses said, "so when we come up there you can go right in there and get them."

His friend looked at him for a moment out of the corner of his eyes, and he wasn't smiling now. "Like hell," he said emphatically, "you wanted that smoke, not me. I don't go in them places. It's too much trouble keepin' quiet when they treat you bad if there's a bad counterman. I just keep out."

"Okay, okay, don't get all steam," said the other. "I got no fears. I walk right in and ask for cigarettes, treat me bad, treat me good, treat me anyways."

"I wouldn't go in for nothin'," said his friend. "Charley Oakes went in one place like that on Forty-second Street last week and he said that counterman like to throwed that food at him. Charley says never again, it's too much trouble not sayin' anything."

"Okay," said the older man, "I go in, I got no fears." They walked on now in silence till they came to a white-fronted restaurant, the window of which had, written in English lettering across it, THE IDEAL. The two men paused outside for a moment and then the man with the glasses opened the door and went inside. "I be right out," he said to his friend.

There were no people in the restaurant and a lone counterman leaned on the long counter reading a copy of the *Mirror*. He did not look up as the Negro came in, and the colored man paused, then walked toward the back of the shop looking for a cigarette-vending machine. Halfway to the rear he encountered a rope stretched across the space between the counter and the wall, bearing the sign, "This Section Closed." The lights in the closed section were off and the back walls were almost in total darkness. He paused at the rope and the counterman looked up. He was very tough-looking, with a bald head and a hard, seamed face.

"Whadaya want?" he said to the colored man.

"I was just looking for a cigarette machine back here," said the colored man. "I want to get a package."

"Well just duck under that rope," said the counterman and he stood up straight, folding his paper, "it's way against that back wall."

"Okay," said the Negro. He went under the rope, getting down on his hands and knees to do so, and got up on the other side.

The counterman followed him down on his side of the counter and when he came to the string from an overhanging light he snapped it on. "Now you can see," he said, his face expressionless.

The Negro glanced at him, then he smiled briefly. "Well," he said, "thank you, thank you."

"That's okay," said the counterman, "a guy comes down here in this dark and you could kill yourself falling down over something."

"That's right," said the Negro, "you could fall down over something without seeing it. Thanks."

"That's okay," said the counterman. The Negro felt in his pockets for the four dimes, then the counterman spoke again. "Those are all good except the slot for Pall Malls," he said, "that one's broken, so don't pull that one."

"Thanks," said the colored man. "I only wanted Chesterfields. I'll just pull that slot."

"Oh, that slot's all right," said the other, "only the Pall Mall one is broken."

The Negro put in two of the four dimes, pulled the lever and got his cigarettes. He opened the package at once and tapped a cigarette up. "Have a cigarette?" he said to the counterman and he extended the pack across the counter.

"Thanks," said the counterman and his stolid face cracked slightly with a difficult smile. He reached under his apron into the pocket of his dirty white pants and took out some matches and lit one and by that time the Negro had a cigarette in his mouth and the counterman extended the lit match. Then he lit his own cigarette and spoke again. "Ain't it hot out?" he said.

"Man, is it hot," said the Negro heartily. "I work over to them docks and man, it's like hell it's so hot. Even at night."

"It's hot here," said the counterman. "That damned stove is hot with this weather."

"I bet it is," said the Negro.

They started to walk back toward the front of the store and when he came to the electric light cord the counterman snapped out the light and then the colored man ducked under the rope. He walked a few steps further and then he turned to the counterman suddenly.

"Say," he said "have you got a cup of tea here?"

"Sure we got tea," said the counterman. "You want a cup of tea?"

"Yes," said the Negro, "I think that would go good. A cup of tea is just what I need, I think."

The counterman poured some boiling water into a cup and put a tea-ball into it and set it on the counter and the Negro sat down. "What else?" said the counterman.

"I guess that's all," said the Negro and he put a dime on the counter, "they say you take something hot and it cools you off."

"It does every time," said the counterman. "I drink two or three cups of that or coffee every night. If you're hot inside you get cool outside." He went to the cash register and rang up the dime. He stood now for a moment in front of the colored man puffing on his cigarette, then he went down the counter and picked up a large glass dish which bore on top of it a half-loaf of crumb cake and he carried it back to the Negro. "You want something good, you take a piece of this," he said.

The Negro looked at the counterman smiling in a pleased manner and he did not pause a second before he spoke. "You're the boss on things to eat," he said.

The counterman cut a piece of cake for the colored man and put it on a plate and gave it to him. The Negro fished into his pocket and took out his last dime. He looked at it, for the briefest moment hesitating, then he put it down and the counterman rang it up on the cash register. After the Negro had taken the first bite the counterman spoke again, and there was almost enthusiasm in his tone. "How's that?" he said, "that's pretty good, hey?"

"Man," said the colored man, "that sure is a good piece of cake." He ate it slowly, relishing it, sipping his tea between bites. The counterman returned to his paper and neither spoke again until the Negro had finished and stood up. "Well," said the Negro, "the best of luck to you."

The counterman looked up, "I'll be seeing you," he said. The colored man walked to the door and waved his hand airily at the counterman. "Keep in the shade," said the counterman.

The Negro laughed out loud at this. "I sure will," he said, "I sure will and you do too."

Outdoors his friend was leaning against the next building and when he saw the older man come out he yelled at him. "Where in hell you been?" he said. "You been in there a hell of a time."

"Well," said the man with the spectacles, "I just got hot, so I took some tea."

"Come on," said his friend. "We won't be home by daylight like this." They covered the half-block to the subway at a brisk pace but when they came to the entrance uptown the man with the glasses stopped.

"I just been thinkin'," he said, "I ain't seen the sun come up for one hell of a time. I just think I'll walk uptown a ways. Maybe all the way home."

His friend stared at him incredulously for a long moment. "You're crazy," he said, "you're just plain crazy."

"Maybe I am," said the colored man with the glasses. He did not stop to argue further but walked off alone, rapidly, his hands thrust in his empty overall pockets, turning up Seventh Avenue in the direction of Harlem. For two blocks he walked up the deserted avenue, and then he said, half aloud, to the early morning darkness. "Maybe I am. I guess maybe I am."

NORMAN MAILER

A Calculus at Heaven

Father Meary, April 1942, third day

He will not be a part-time thing.

Sometimes they all were running, sometimes walking running crawling. All of them, Rice the Indian, Father Meary, the captain, cursing and stumbling; thirty men, gouging, elbowing, crawling through their narrow increment in space. "Come on," the captain shouted, "Come on, come on," and Father Meary looking back at him, stumbled and fell. In the distance, he could hear the guns debating still, fiercely as if they were intolerant of each other, and the sounds were breaking and bursting in his head. He rolled over on the ground, feeling the captain tugging at his shoulder, swearing at him. "Come on, we got to get to the house." He saw men passing him, running isolated from each other, and although the panic was in him too, he felt separated from them. Not understanding, he stumbled to his feet. Jogging after the retreating men, feeling the captain by him, motivating him through space by his presence, he told himself that the man should not have sworn at him, he was an officer of God.

He did not understand, everything had suddenly mixed inside him, burbled like the running mass of men, and what had happened back in the second trench line he did not know. For two days they had been holding back the Japanese, and then suddenly the trench line had broken, had gone, and he was running with the men. "Oh, Heavenly Father," automatically he began, and then the harshness of the machine-gun, the mechanical signpost to death, had sounded behind him, and feeling a hand against his back, he had prostrated himself before the earth only to hear the enemy's cry of victory, pulsing behind him, working its way up from the beach. Then they were up again, running all the time now, dropping whenever a gun sounded, stumbling up the leisurely pitted street of Tinde. His prayers lost their logical sequence, became jumbled. "Hail Mary, Pax est. . . ."

Then himself, once more a part of the struggling ill-formed matrix of men running hoarse-breathed to . . . to where? He needed assurance, his plump hands wavering uncertainly away from his body as he tripped, and caught up and tripped, trying desperately not to fall behind the men running . . . running to where? The captain was leading them, the captain must know, he thought. The captain was a military man.

Under him, he felt his thin legs bend together once more, felt himself breathing in the dirt, the city of Tinde flowing into his material self as the sounds from the arena—the Roman arena, he thought—as the sounds came closer and closer, became embodied in the intolerance of the machine-gun. He didn't have to fall, he thought, he was already on the ground. But the gun had stopped, and then he felt the earth careening away from him. After a moment he realized that someone had picked him up, carrying him with his head down, his face near the man's back. He watched the cross on his shoulder, swaying from his uniform, jerkily in an unholy rhythm, and when it fell off, he found himself gazing after it, as if it were a bird disappearing in the sky. When he could see it no more, he still kept his eyes focused for it, seeing the ground twist and recede under him. He was terrified; his head upside down, felt heavy and uncomfortable, the back carrying him was not broad—he felt an augment of his fear. The men running beside him, was there terror at their faces too? The lines had broken, he kept telling himself, but how, but when; he felt his absolute sense of time leaving him. He didn't understand such affairs, he was a godly man, he did not know of such matters, but the Japanese had come through, their faces yellow with lust. The pagan men, they would not understand, they would not respect a man of

God. He had lost his cross, they would shoot him with the rest. The smoke of death was over the city.

The gun came back, hovered about him; the man carrying him made a sound, lurched and fell. Father Meary fell with him, the two tangled in the dirt. He felt blood on his face, and turning his head on the ground, realized that none of the men were running any more, that they all lay in random prostration on the ground, while the gun and then another gun spoke angrily over them. Hearing screams, he could no longer feel that men were dying, but their souls . . . it meant . . . he thought of Conditional Absolution for them. There was blood on his face but he felt no pain. . . .

Once in San Francisco an unhappiness had come to him and had remained for many months. One evening in the winter, he had been traveling through the city and, feeling hunger, had entered unthinking the first restaurant he passed. The food was not expensive, and feeling his unhappiness more pointedly, he had ordered the highest priced dinner. The meal had been excellent, the waitress attractive. She had seemed to him a little bit like a Madonna from the school of Florence, and after the meal had been over, he had given her the dollar for the meal, and happy with her face, had added half of it again for the tip. He had noted the surprise on her face, and feeling happy he had said, "If there is anything I like, it is a well prepared meal, well served, by a pretty young waitress like yourself." Embarrassed by the effort he had made to keep his voice deep, he left before she could thank him. Outside, he had suddenly felt more unhappy than before.

. . . The machine-gun came back, licking at the bodies of the men about him. Overhead, a few planes distorted the sky. "It's a death-trap, it's a death-trap," he heard someone muttering beside him. The terror had worked its way into his fingertips; every muscle seemed to have sprung free, quivering loosely. The fact of his probable death came to him, and it loosed a new type of fear. Already, in the road, the tap-tap-tap of men's souls changing existences had begun. He was afraid, he had lived his life for the moment of meeting his death, and he was afraid. He did not understand—but why? And then all thought in his mind trailed out along the ground, and he could only feel his fear. After that, only the sun, warm on his back. The machine-gun, indecent, angry again; God taking his inscrutable will.

Were they all to die here, lying in a road, while a machine-gun worked from body to body, seemingly never satisfying itself that the body it was striking was dead? He saw a man beside him waver to his feet, throw a hand-grenade at the machine-gun. Somewhere he heard a shout, and then the grenade fulfilling itself. The machine-gun did not sound any more. Then the men about him, on their feet again, running. On hands and knees he saw himself counting them, guessing they were ten or twelve, until abruptly he realized that in their run down the road he was being left behind. On his feet, laboring after them, shouting, "Captain Hilliard, Captain, Captain," shouting, and then he fell. Someone had run back, was dragging him; he felt dirt forcing against his face, abrading his plump white flesh. He was trying to hold back his groan, but then the pain ceased, the rough dirt changing to mud, becoming actually wet. He remembered. They were going into the stone house by the edge of the swamp. The sounds about him seemed to be changing, perhaps he heard a cheer. The man let him go, he saw it was the Indian, Thomas Rice; he must thank him. Another machine-gun ripped at them from a hill, men falling about him again. Dirt was in his eyes, he could not see; in the terrible moment, he felt a hand pulling him; half crouching, he felt himself led to the cellar window, felt its rough stone sides scraping against his flanks as he crawled through, fell suddenly for two or three feet onto a pile of sandbags. Men kept coming over him, he crawled away. Still dazed, he was able to see a little out of his eyes. Someone had kicked him angrily. Looking up, he saw it had been DaLucci, but he could feel no anger. Was the man Catholic and godless? . . . Ahh . . . these Italians.

His situation came back more clearly. He remembered now that the house had been prepared as a defense three days before. On the edge of the swamp . . . it was cool here, if only it didn't become too wet. He felt himself drifting away again . . . the cellar walls seemed sandbagged . . . that meant less splinters, he imagined, it was functional, he was certain. . . . If only his wrist weren't so painful. He must have sprained it when he fell through the window. Were they safe from a cannonading, he wondered, and then abruptly, he sat up, panic catching at him. How many men left? He counted four, counted again, there were only four besides himself—Captain Hilliard, DaLucci, Rice and a blond soldier he did not know. Did it mean he was to die after all? He could see the Indian firing the gun, the blond soldier feeding. He heard him say, "That's it, Sergeant, give it back to 'em, Sergeant, give it to those bastards." The priest noted it numbly, long conditioning having accustomed him to the sound of the profanity. He wondered how safe they were, could the brick house really shut out the Japanese? Fascinated, he watched the sunlight glancing through the window, leaving the cellar almost completely dark. . . .

For months, Sister Vittoria had been treating him with especial attention, complimenting him on his lessons when he had prepared them well; looking *sad and unhappy rather than angry, when he had played ball out on the street too long the day before. He noticed, even, that she spoke of him to Sister Josette and pointed to him often, as the best student in the class. He liked it; the kids used to call him "teacher's pet," but it didn't bother him as much as it had used to, because somehow, he had always liked studying a little better than fighting the kids on the block. So that when she called him over one day and pinched his cheek, and gave him a letter to his mother, he was not surprised.*

His mother had read it slowly several times; he feeling shame for her at the unease with which she read. He kept thinking of how his mother didn't smell as cool and starchy as Sister Vittoria. But then his mother had looked up at him, from her chair, and smiled at him very happily. They talked a long while. "Be a priest, be a priest, Timothy," she kept saying, "and God will always be with you." He kept feeling how uncomfortable she was with the words. "It's an honor, do you know, it's an honor." Then later . . . "God will not be a part-time thing to be shared with a woman, and sure with a paycheck, but he will stay." And he, the boy, after a long while, "But I do not want to be a priest, mother, I do not feel a vocation." She had sighed. "You will be the most important man of all your friends, you will be more important than any rich man; do you know what that means for a poor man." He had shook his head, unhappy. "Think of it," she had said.

Then two weeks later, Sister Vittoria had called him into her private little study room. She had talked to him in her beautiful soft voice, and he had been unsure beneath it. At last when she asked, "Do you not feel a vocation stirring within you?" he had tried, contracting his stomach forcibly to feel some inner tenseness or emotion, as he was to squeeze it in later years when he looked at religious paintings. "I think, Sister, I think I do feel a small vocation within me." She had smiled. "You are fortunate, Timothy, you will feel it grow and grow, there are very few men who are godly enough to feel even the beginnings of one." As he had been about to go out the door, he had turned to her and said, "Sister Vittoria, I feel, I think I feel it growing a little more already."

Light red dust was filtering across the column of sunlight in the cellar. He saw the Indian firing every now and then, saw the captain speaking beside him. "We're going to save the mortar until they bring one up; just keep firing the gun. We're protected here, we'll be able to knock their mortar out first. Now look, we've got to hold the road out there, there's only one other way to the coastal road, and that's being defended by a house like this one . . . only with more men probably."

Father Meary forced himself into devotion. Oh, my God, I am ready to meet you, he thought desperately. But a piece of plaster broke from the ceiling, its fragments landing on his chest, and he felt death with it. Once, he had said, in speaking to the men, "There are no atheists in fox-holes. All of you do not have the same faith I do, but all of you believe in the supremacy of God." "But, Father Meary," someone had interrupted him. He had stared back coldly. "When you meet your Maker, you believe. . . . You must believe. . . ." Then why this persistent fear? His tired mind fought against relaxing, fought against the temptings of Hell. But the words sounded ornate to him for a moment. Almost crying, he demanded all the resolution within him. The men must not see him crying, they would have their faith weakened if they did. And they would have need of him in the house when the Japanese threatened even more. He got to his feet; he would comfort them.

In the semi-gloom of the cellar, they were crouched against the wall or under the window, firing the machine-gun irregularly, being answered irregularly. They did not seem to know he was with them. He slumped, feeling his resolution ebb. Three days before, in preparing the house they had dug a slit trench against one of the side walls. It would be better if he were to remain in it, where a chance bullet could not reach him. After all, he could not do the men any good if he were dead. And then mockingly, he felt his fear disappearing, as he dropped into the greater safety of the trench. He shut his eyes. Why, why had he been afraid; it disturbed the order of things, the certainties were not so . . . well, not so certain. But he believed, he was certain he believed more than ever. For with the horrors he had seen, well of necessity God existed, for men could not bear up under the horrors they saw, if it were not for God. He kept thinking of this, trying to strengthen it in his mind.

The silence disturbed him; he realized that the guns had stopped for a moment. Crouching in the darkness, he wished for them to start again, so that he could think about it and reinforce it even more in his mind. . . .

❦

The Captain, 1926 - 1930

Two tight kids on a red silk coverlet. . . .

He spent his college life with the creative clique; surrealist poetry was in vogue. He drank a lot, he would be very happy for a while, and then very unhappy, but in back of it all, he felt a certain integrity within him, a certain feeling which made him know that he would paint, that he would slap the lie of America across a thousand canvases, that he would shove beauty into a million people who had never felt it before, that he would shake people up, stamp on them, blast their smugness away, and say, "Here, here is your graft, here is your marriage morality (a picture of a business man sleeping with a prostitute, with a little locket on the canvas entitled 'Sister') here is your democracy (a portrait of a syphilitic Negro), and finally, here is your life (which was a tryptych of a motion picture, a clerk, and a plain woman to represent the clerk's wife)." Only . . . in hating all this, he was reaffirming himself, for like all college men who stop believing, he was at the particular point where he was the only person who had ever realized a slum or recognized the lie in a politician's voice.

He had come to this endowed university, wondering, already beginning to disbelieve, but he was young and enthusiastic. (Later he was to say, "You stop believing in God at seventeen, in communism at twenty-seven.") Breaking from his family, he was to paint (it was not a new situation, he had read it in several books), but his father was an army colonel, and he had been allowed to go to this university only on the agreement with his father that he, Bowen Hilliard, was to join the R.O.T.C. and to remain in it until after graduation when he would have attained a reserve commission. So that in 1926, when of the class of '30, he was one of the forty-one freshmen out of eight hundred to sport the khaki uniform with the blue lapels, it was to be to him a sign of disparity as painful and unique as the soda jerker who from some outside compulsion had been forced to grow a beard.

Bowen Hilliard, not believing, made the university's literary magazine; Bowen Hilliard, not believing, was known as the best artist in college. Bowen Hilliard went up to Boston and picketed the streets before Sacco and Vanzetti were killed, and came back to write an editorial in the magazine which was to suspend it for a half-year, "Listen, America, listen to your shame. . . ."

He defended nothing intellectually, almost everything emotionally. He said, "The only thing infinite about man is his vanity," but he liked to walk in the streets, to feel people about him. He painted a great deal, read a great many books of art criticism, so that his painting was always conscious, articulate; he was one of the few artists who could explain his work clearly, and what it made him feel. He said he believed in nothing, and he enjoyed it, for he found that believing in nothing meant believing in himself, and at that time he was capable of it. Certainly, he was growing as an artist, his line (always his weak point) was becoming more certain; he had always had an acute sense of texture, but beyond that his canvases had a measure of structural feeling, unusual for a college painter. During this time he painted a discordant abstraction in which the color did not coincide with the line area, very much like a badly printed comic in a newspaper—and he had termed this his masterpiece and called it *Society Out of Whack*. . . .

He was to believe in someone else by his senior year. . . . At a party, he met a girl named Cova—there was to be a lot of drinking—and somehow at the end, he was to sleep the night with her. Eventually they were to know each other very well, but in the darkness only the crudest attempts were to be made. "What color are your eyes?" she had asked, and when he had told her brown, she sighed. "I thought they were blue, somehow," she said. Then she laughed. "Of course it doesn't matter. . . ."

The intellectual's passion is ramified by its implications; the artist's is augmented. Cova became an absolute to him, and, in many ways, since she was beautiful and intense and clever, and therefore was like his image of himself (the image of the artist), he was to become an absolute for her. In the last year of college, they had their unhappinesses, but they felt them more healthy, for they came from acute realizations rather than from a doubting of themselves.

They came to a certain understanding early, for she had other lovers besides Bowen Hilliard. "I can't paint," she had said, "and I can't write music, and I don't write nearly so well as I should like to. You must see it; when I take a man, and I may take him for a lot of reasons, in back of it all is the feeling that that is when I'm making something, and that that is something I can do better than any other woman. I don't envy you your paintings, Bowen, you can't envy mine. Some women are born to have a lot of men."

In a measure he understood, and by the time they were out of college and married, it even made sense to him. For he had found that she might take a man for a variety of reasons, because (although this was not often), he attracted her, or because the situation warranted it, or because she was sorry for him. (He once said, "You like any man who is under five feet four and has acne.") or in many cases because it was necessary in the evolution of the friendship, but always she had come back to him, loving him more, taking him more fiercely, reaffirming and even re-evaluating their absolute. She said to him once after a long silence, "We're like two tight kids on a red silk coverlet," and that was what they went by. That was what they believed in. . . .

❦

The men, April 1942, first day

There was a dame once. . . .

Heavy with morning and the tenseness of the night before, the men lay encrusted in their double line of trenches, gazing out to sea. Tight and uncomfortable with a fear of butterflies and leadenness in their bellies, gazing nervously out to sea, out between the two arms of the harbor of Tinde. All through the night, polishing the weapons, preparing themselves, cleansing themselves with furtive finalities in every motion. Anxiously, eyes at sea, waiting, who will see the first boat? Looking with dry eyes and throat, tongues licking at the backs of dry and sticky teeth. What will it be like, what will it be like, Jesus Christ . . . Jesus Christ. . . .

The major in command of the three companies at Tinde had written a despatch for his men that morning. It read:—

THE JAPANESE ATTACKED AT OTEI 0623. THE FORCE CONSISTED OF A FLEET OF ARMORED BARGES. WE HAVE RECEIVED A REPORT THAT HALF OF THE BARGES HAVE CONTINUED ON TOWARD TINDE. ANALOW ISLAND IS SURROUNDED BY IMPASSABLE CLIFFS ON THIS SIDE. THE ONLY POSSIBLE LANDING PLACES ARE AT HANSON BEACH, OTEI, AND TINDE. SINCE THEY HAVE ALREADY ATTACKED THE OTHER TWO POINTS IT IS A CERTAINTY THAT THEY WILL PROCEED ON TO HERE.

I knew this dame once, it was back in Albany. She was saying to me I know your kind, bud, they come twenty to the dozen, so I say to her, you count a funny dozen sister, why don't you come here and play dozen with me. Funny, she says, aren't you. I wasn't going to take that from any dame, I tell her, listen, after they made me, they threw the mold away, it was cracked from laughing so hard at my line. Well, she took it a little easier after that, but . . . I dunno, it was still no deal. . . . When the hell are they gonna come? . . .

WE ARE DEFENDING ONE ISLAND IN A CHAIN OF ISLANDS. THE JAPANESE DO NOT CONSIDER THIS ISLAND IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO SEND ANY NAVAL UNITS ALONG. WE ARE GOING TO SHOW THEM THEY HAVE MADE A MISTAKE. THEIR MOTOR BOAT FLEETS ARE PROGRESSING FROM ISLAND TO ISLAND. IF WE HOLD THEM HERE, THEY WILL HAVE TO REVISE THEIR PLAN OF ATTACK. CONTROL OF THE CHAIN DEPENDS ON THE CONTROL OF ANY SINGLE ISLAND. CONTROL OF THIS ISLAND DEPENDS ON CONTROL OF THE COASTAL ROAD WHICH RUNS ALONG THE NORTHERN SIDE OF THE ISLAND, FROM HANSON BEACH TO OTEI TO TINDE. OUR MAIN FORCE IS AT HANSON BEACH AND WILL HOLD THE JAPANESE UNLESS THEY ARE ABLE TO SEND REINFORCEMENTS

FROM OTEI OR TINDE. WE MUST HOLD THE CITY, BUT MORE IMPORTANT, WE MUST MAINTAIN CONTROL OF THE COASTAL ROAD.

There was this movie, Jimmie Cagney, I think. Did you see it when it played in town? 'Cause I saw it you know at the Strand in New York. They had a band there . . . I can't remember the name, only the vocalist with them was all right, I can still remember her. But anyway, the movie was all about war, only it was in France; there was no little island fighting in the last one ya know, and this guy Jimmie Cagney is yellow, it gave me quite a jump 'cause you know Cagney, but then I figured that it's anybody's turn to be yella maybe when it all starts happening. Have you got any idea of the time? . . . That picture gave me quite a smack, I ain't forgetting it in a hurry. . . .

IF OUR LINES SHOULD CRACK, WE MUST STILL KEEP THEM FROM TAKING THE COASTAL ROAD WHICH IS ABOUT TWO MILES INLAND FROM THE CITY AT THIS POINT. THERE ARE TWO STREETS LEADING OUT TO IT, AND WE HAVE CONSTRUCTED FORTRESSES IN A SEPARATE HOUSE COMMANDING EACH ROAD. FOR THE RIGHT FLANK WINDOWS COMMAND EVERY DIRECTION. THE HOUSE ON THE LEFT FLANK IS THE OLD BANKERS STONE HOUSE, SITUATED IN THE SWAMP WITH ONLY ONE SIDE ON SOLID GROUND. ALL WINDOWS HAVE BEEN SEALED WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE CELLAR WINDOW WHICH COMMANDS THE ROAD. IF BY ANY CHANCE YOUR LINES CRACK, YOU MUST TRY TO REACH ONE OF THE HOUSES, THAT IS ESSENTIAL.

Tamping rifle butts slowly on the ground, snapping cigarettes nervously against thumbnails, waiting, waiting for the attack, I dunno, I never saw action before. The end of his heel delicately clicking against the other, waiting for the fall of a little clod of mud. It kinda gets ya waitin', doesn't it. I wish there was somethin' to do sort of. Fingering at a button, moving the hat back and forth. These cirgarettes taste kinda good, I mean, you know, you smoke 'em all, and they taste the same, and then maybe ya find one ya like . . . I dunno, you know what I mean.

IT IS NOW APRIL, FOUR MONTHS AFTER WAR HAS STARTED, YOU ALL KNOW THAT WE ARE UNEQUIPPED, WITHOUT TANKS AND AIRCRAFT. INSTALLATIONS ARE NOT EVEN A WEEK OLD ON THE ISLAND. HOWEVER, THE JAPANESE HAVE TO MAKE A LANDING, AND THAT ADVANTAGE RESTS WITH US. YOU WILL FIGHT FOR YOUR COUNTRY, THE GREATEST IN THE WORLD. GOOD LUCK.

Just where do ya think ya're shovin' that rifle? Get it out of my face.

Take it easy bud, take it easy.

Well, I like my face, see, I don't like it ruined, ther're girls back home, got to go for this face.

I said I was sorry, what the hell were ya blockin' the path.

Listen, bud, you ain't talkin' to Joe Crap, see; you watch what you say with me.

Aaaaah, save it for the Japs.

Well where are they, well when the hell are they comin'? The goddam yellow bastards, what are they, afraid to fight? . . .

❦

The Captain: 1931 - 1936

Something soothing, yet jolly . . . .

The year Bowen Hilliard married Cova Reynolds was the year of the unemployment march on Washington. They were not to do very well. His art was still improving, still powerful, still better than competent in execution, but it was not the year to sell paintings. Their friends bought a few, but their friends had no money either, and Bowen, hating the talk of price, had valued his paintings low, so that when his friends bought them, they said, "I'm sorry as hell, Bowen," and he took to snarling back, "It's all right, goddam you, it's all right." Cova had a small income from her family, which she increased with her earnings as a twelve-dollar-a-week shop-girl, but he hadn't seen his family since college, and there was no money in them anyway.

After a while, when the country didn't come to see his work, and he knocked no people down with it, he began to get a little tighter. Occasionally he compromised with some mantelpiece art, but even that wasn't selling very well. The galleries were closing down everywhere. Once, in one of the back galleries in the fifties, a dealer had agreed to put on a two-week exhibition of his work. . . .

For three days they sat around, Cova by him (she had lost her job), and they would not speak very much until a friend came in. Then they all started chattering very violently, becoming satirical or enthusiastic in turn over painters, screaming platitudes on Munch and Beckmann and Marin, and then abruptly going quiet. The dealer, Mr. Loestler, was taking three hours for lunch by this time. They all knew it was a mistake. Hilliard looked at his fourteen canvases, at the gray carpeting of the dealer's office, and then muttered something about the light being bad. "It's killing them," he said slowly. "It's killing them, I tell you." Cova was pacing around. She turned to his friends, who were polite, sympathetic and enthusiastic to the best degree of taste, and said, "I still can't learn anything about when they're good or not, but they are good, they are good, aren't they?"

"Cova!" he said.

He watched her coming toward him, making the most of her red dress. It fitted with the carpet he thought. "I'm sorry, Bowen," she said. He gained control of himself. "It's all right, I'm sorry, too," he said.

Their friends left. Another batch would be coming in soon, he knew. The dealer's shop was dry smelling. "They *are* good," he whispered desperately to himself. He thought of their two-room flat. If only they would let him do something for the walls he thought. A mural perhaps, *The Artist Out of Whack.*

Then the terrible event occurred. A woman came in to buy something. She was forty, had dark hair, and was growing fat. She wanted a picture for her children's room. "Something soothing, yet happy looking. In good taste, of course." How many jokes had he heard like that. How many long tedious artist's jokes. She looked about for awhile. "I'd like that," she said. It was an experiment with a Barbizon Landscape. Something about the composition of the field he had been in reminded him of a bad Corot, but beyond that, the entire view had been a little too rich, a little too green, a little too much foliage, almost as if any brown cow that had strayed into the field would have had its flanks of a deep purple to maintain the color order. "What is it called?" she asked. "Whore in a Green Negligee," he said. Cova looked at him in horror, a protest of poverty in her eyes. The woman recovered, "Well, I don't have to call it that, I suppose," she said. He held his anger, "No, of course not." Afterward, she bargained with him for the painting, making the final bit of bad taste in the artist-patron breach of etiquette, he decided. She got it for thirty-five dollars. He had spent two weeks on it. After that, when he could not sell a painting right away, he gave it to somebody, be it a boy roller-skating, or a shopkeeper, or a laborer in a ditch. (He once said, "I have more paintings in delicatessens than any other representative artist in America.")

For four years he held on, working with the W. P. A. for awhile, but Cova and he were losing something. People no longer thought them clever and talented; men were not so interested in making love to Cova any more. As for him, she became the last outpost. Over and over through the bad years, he took her with a terrible kind of fury, performing almost every time, it seemed, a lover's last entrance. But they were depending on each other too much, trying to draw everything, able to believe in nothing else.

Once, when his depression had lasted for months, he started to write his autobiography. As a book, it was amorphous, but since he added to it from time to time, the brunt of his thought began to fill it. He would write; "Malraux says that all that men are willing to die for tends to justify their fate by giving it a foundation in dignity. Perhaps, everywhere, this is felt. But in America, men live, work and die without even the rudest conception of a dignity. At their death . . . well then they wonder what the odds are on a heaven, and perhaps they make futile desperate bets on it, adding up their crude moral calculus, so that if the big team, heaven, comes through, and wins and therefore exists, they will be able to collect their bets that evening. . . ." And much more like that, but he felt himself weakening.

He was to surrender at last. Cova's family had been architects for several generations, and in 1936 he gave up, accepting a job with them as a draftsman. After a year, by studying on the side, he was an architect of sorts. They were living much better, (they could afford to live in the Village now), but he found very little desire to paint. . . . To make up for it, he worked on his book quite steadily. . . .

❧

DaLucci, April 1942, first, second, third days

it's cheap . . . it's cheap. . . .

After the boats had come into sight around the end of the harbor, DaLucci hadn't known what he was doing for two days. Every now and then, though, he could remember them coming nearer, coming nearer, he wishing there was a cannon around somewhere, any lousy bit of field piece to keep them away, but they just kept coming. A coupla Jap planes had started fighting with an American one and they had whipped all around the sky, going out to sea and then coming back. When they started to strafe the beach and the trenches he just sort of ducked automatically, going up and down with the rest like he was a goddam jack-in-the-box, or something, but he didn't know, Jesus, they kept actin' like they was out to get him first. He wished he could shoot something, but the Jap boats were too far away, although he could see them keep coming and coming.

His sergeant, the Indian, kept bending over the machine-gun, waiting for them, whistling something, lining it up this way and that, firing it short, just a little ta-ta-ta-, to see how it was working, but all DaLucci knew was that he felt just like puking.

Holding on to his Garand, he didn't know what to do with it. After a while, with them moving in all the time, he had picked it up, and started shooting, until someone pushed him down. Then the Jap boats started beaching, and the machine-guns on each side of him started going, there was more noise than he'd ever heard in his life before, he didn't know, he just kept emptying and loading his rifle, shooting at them but not taking aim. When he looked up, he could see that with all their boats coming in at once, they'd been able to sneak one up on the shore. First thing, before their men tried to come out, they started lobbing with a field mortar from the boat, but then the machine-guns on each side of him and all over the place had started cutting that boat to pieces, and even a coupla of their own mortars started cracking down. It mighta been Fourth of July if it wasn't for all that black smoke.

Only during all this, the Japs got a coupla of other boats on the shore, and they were shooting for all hell from the guns they had mounted in the front part of the barge. He ducked down for a second, scared, and when he looked up again, and started shooting, he could see that there was four boats on the beach now, with their guns all going, and mortars—he heard a whistle, someone shoved him down, and then there was a guy screaming his yap off next to him, falling down, holding his face. For a second, he thought the guy's blood was his own, 'cause it was all over him, but then he knew he was standing, and there was nothing hurting him. The guy was grabbing at his feet and looking up at him. He couldn't look at the guy's face, there was so much blood, so goddam much noise. "What the hell," he said, "What the hell, whatthehell." and then another mortar came, and he had to duck again. . . .

In Terre Haute where he lived in the poor part of town, the people used to have their coal bins under the sidewalk, with big metal plates, like sewer covers, over them. When the coal trucks came along, they would unscrew a plate, and dump as much coal in as they ordered. The metal covers were to keep the coal from getting wet.

When they first moved in, there was no cover for their bin. A few years before, a cover had broken, and after that, whenever a family moved out, the house without the cover would take the one that was left.

He was too young to know this when they started living there, but the first thing in his whole life that he did remember was when the family next to him moved out, and they had gotten a coal cover for their house at last. Everybody in the family was very happy, and they kept showing it to him, saying, "Here, Tony, look, look, see the cover," but he was too young and hadn't understood. Not knowing why, he had struck at the cover, and started crying. When they laughed at him for this, he had a temper fit, and Mama DaLucci had had to give him a little wine.

For two days the whole thing kept up. The Japs kept losing men, and coming in, and where they had gotten four boats in at one point, they caused a lot of trouble. Everybody was working on them, (and it was hard to hit them because only the machine-gunner showed, and the Japs crouched behind the steel front of the barge), and while they were trying to take care of the four boats, another two had landed on the other side of his flank, and had gone over the barbed wire with mattresses, piling into a front trench and going like mad there. They couldn't fire any mortars into the trench, because the men were fighting too close together there, and then when another part of the front trenches half emptied to send men over to where the Japs had gotten in, the first Japs, waiting in the four boats, had emptied out, and captured almost a hundred yards of front trenches. From there they set up a fire so hot that DaLucci didn't even stick his head up for five minutes. But while this was going on, all the other Jap boats, or most of them, were able to land behind the part of trench that the Japs held. All the rest of the afternoon, the Japs kept fighting in the front trenches, and along toward night, he heard a guy say that they had control of the front trenches down the whole line. After that, it got so he couldn't stick his head up without going to lose it too, and the two trenches, not seventy yards apart had kept firing up and down at each other. For two days, he had been ducking into the dugout, catching a bit of sleep that kept being interrupted, choking down a chocolate bar, and standing around under a trench, not knowing what to do, afraid to stand up and aim that gun of his, but even more afraid of the sergeant who kept yelling at him to get up and shoot. So every now and then, he just had to close his eyes almost, stand up, just fire his gun, three or four times as fast as he could, and then drop back in the trench. He never saw anyone long enough to take aim on him like they taught him at target school. The three planes that had been fighting the day it all started, had crashed, he thought, but every now and then an American or a Jap plane would come out and take shots until another plane came to fight it, and then the two of them would lace it up all over the sky, sometimes twisting all the way out to sea, or maybe getting lost on the jungle side of the island. Once, he heard that a Jap plane had crashed in the swamp, but he didn't know about that.

After two days though, it seemed as if both sides were all finished, and everything let up on the morning of the third day. The lieutenant came along, and told them that half of them could get sleep. The sergeant had picked him out as one of them, saying it looked like he wasn't any use any way, and he might as well sleep so the sergeant could have him off his mind. He didn't like that at all, but he figured it would be awful good to get out of that goddam noise and heat.

But after he got down to the dugout, he found that he just lay on his bed going tense all over. After a while, he turned over, and that seemed to loosen him a little bit, but all the while he could feel this anger growing in him, and not knowing why, he kept murmuring, "It's cheap, it's cheap." He kept thinking of his house and his job back in Terre Haute, and somehow that made him get angrier. He kept seeing the porch with the railing in the place where it had come off, and how through the years each of the vertical sticks that held it up were pulled off to fight with, or had worked off in the rain and wind. Even when the guns sounded every now and then, he was so excited he couldn't listen to them, but kept thinking of his old man, the fat . . . and here he started cursing him, sobbing a little between the words, which he pulled out one at a time from his stomach. He remembered the old man sitting on the porch of the house that was coming apart in Terre Haute, not even a drinking Italian, goddam him, sitting there all pooped out after work . . . after working twelve hours a day, breaking a length of railroad track in, making sixteen a week, sitting on the porch in his shirt sleeves, reading a newspaper . . . turning to the sports page, and reading it slowly, talking to his friends, telling old riddles to the kids, pinching mama's bottom, with a huh, haw, huh, not even playing cards with his friends, just sitting there on the porch, all pooped out, just a fat hunk of flesh, talking about Italy. Frig him, frig him, frig the old man, he kept saying to himself.

A shell from a mortar cracked apart ten or fifteen yards away. Some dirt came flying down the dugout steps, and all through it he heard a guy give out a bunch of yelps that died slowly, like a dog he had once heard after a car ran over it. He kept thinking that maybe some of the guy was mixed up with the earth that was blowing in the dugout, and his stomach felt like it was trying to move around.

He sat up on the bunk sweating, and for a couple of minutes he couldn't get to relax at all. He lit a cigarette, and then after the first couple of inhales, he felt the anger coming back in him, only he started crying. A guy across from him in the next bunk sat up too. "Take it easy, bud," he heard him say, "let's have a cigarette."

"Shut up, you goddam bastard," he yelled. He tossed over the pack. He felt all funny inside, he kept thinking of the lousy job he'd had, first blacking shoes, smelling the stink of people's feet, smelling the stink of shoe polish, he could still smell it, it made him sick even now, being laughed at in school because he had the smell on him. (His fingers came up to his nose, he sniffed at them automatically.) Then, older, another job after another; washing dishes, balancing them on his fingertips when they came out of the machine and were too hot to grab hold of, picking up two-foot piles of plates and lugging them to hell and gone, working at a gas station, best pay to start thirteen a week, he'd worked there for two years, they gave him fifteen, Mary wet against him in the park, "Why don't we get married, Tony?" he getting angry and tight, "Aaaah, go frig yourself, I play it the lone way. Whata you got that I can't get for a buck fifty?" the guys hanging out on the corner, not enough money to go to a whore house, sometimes enough to play pool, what I say, you bastards, is get yourselves a trade, that's the way to make dough, stay off the railroads, they bleed ya dry, looka your old man, what I say is, "Tony, for crise-sakes, whena you gonn' fix that porch railing . . . ?" He sat up again, his head was whirling. "What the hell's it all about?" he kept saying to himself softly. "What the hell . . . ?" Only very softly now.

A soldier stuck his head in. "Come on, they're starting again. Get up here." Numbly he reached for his helmet, slung the pack up, grabbed his gun, and lurched out into the sky that was like the fourth of July only blacker. The Japs were coming over, he kept hearing, and then he began to see it a little. They were doing it the way they had with the boats, charging first at one stretch of trench, and then while all the guns were working there, setting off at another, until there weren't enough guns to cover them all. Then finally, when they did get into a trench, and waited for the reinforcements to come at them, the Japs in the second trenches really charged over with all they had wherever the reinforcements had left.

An order passed down to his platoon to march on to another section, but before they were halfway over, the Japs started racing for the part of trench he was in. Just before this, his head still whirling, he had asked of himself furiously, "What the hell am I in it for, what for, what for?" and then while the Japs came over, he kept screaming, it's cheap, it's cheap, and something musta changed in him, because when the Japs started pouring into the trench not more than forty yards away, he hadn't given a damn about the sergeant or anything, he'd just hurdled out of the trench, and started running for the city. And pretty soon it seemed to him as if the whole goddam army was running with him. . . .

❦

The Captain, 1936-1941

"I don't know, Bowen; we're rotten."

To believe in nothing was no longer a source of comfort to him. At the architect's office, the days passed slowly. He who used to argue that to analyze the relation of line to line without considering texture was an artistic affectation, now placed line on line, inserted textures where they were necessary, only now instead of painting cement-rubble, or reinforced concrete, he sketched in the cross-sectional symbols for them. In the drafting office, the men worked with their sleeves held up by little bicep garters, bending over the long stools, their heads lower than their shoulders. Several of the draftsmen sported spats. He considered this worth a generalization, and said, "Draftsmen are not happy unless they wear spats," but since the people he told it to had never been in a drafting office, they did not consider this particularly profound.

On most mornings when he woke up, he made a grimace. For in a short while he was to spend the rest of his working day transcribing one symbol into another, but he had not invented the symbols. A day at the introverts convention, he used to say to Cova in the mornings, but she rarely smiled at it. He realized that Cova held it against him, considered that he had sold out, and for a while remembering that she had wanted him to take the job, had talked her family into it, he was angry and hurt; but later, he realized that she had felt they were at an impasse, that more money was necessary, and that the opportunity had to be made so that they could refuse it, and reaffirm each other. She had told him to take the job because that was part of the balancing factor; he was to make his decision with the scales even. He knew now that she had wanted him to say, "We'll stick it, we'll keep the W. P. A. job, I will not sell out," which was not to say that she was not tired of living without money, for she was, but the art, he realized too late, was what kept the two tight kids on the red silk coverlet.

One evening, they were out drinking in a bar with a friend, Henry, who had several parallels with Bowen Hilliard. They had all gotten quietly drunk on sidecars, until Henry had broken the silence by chanting over and over, "We are the people of the death-urge, we are the people of the death-urge." "Shut up," Cova had said, but he kept talking. "We are the people of the death-urge. . . . Sounds like Eliot, doesn't it, Bowen?" Then Cova had done something unexpected, reaching over and slapping Henry's face.

"No don't, Cova, don't hit him," he had shouted, and then all three had become conscious of the place they were in. Cova looked at him for just a moment, and then she was crying. "Come on, let's go," he had said. "I'll be late at the office tomorrow, I'll be late. I gotta put in fifteen johns on the third floor of the apartment house we're planning." Henry had started laughing. "Sounds like Eliot, doesn't it, Cova? The artist putting fifteen johns on a blueprint." He had gotten up then. "All right, Cova, let's go. . . . I'm not an artist any more, Henry." "You can't paint when you're dead, can you?" He sucked in his breath. Henry looked up. "I'm sorry," Henry said.

"Forget it."

"No, I said I'm sorry. . . . *Don't* forget it."

After that, when Cova Hilliard slept with a man it was not because it was her act of creation, but because her husband had nothing left to give her. And he, knowing that, had worked harder at the plans for the tan brick apartment house, or had found a passing woman, or even had tried to paint, feeling the rage growing in him as the paint built up on the canvas, until the moment when what he had wanted to do would not superimpose over what he had done, and he had destroyed the painting.

They were reaching a point where they would give the last hard veer away from each other. Already they had broken up several times, but every time, frightened of the step from sensualism to irrevocable cynicism, they had stopped and come together. In one of these rightings, one of the unexplainables happened, and something of the old certainty had come back. It could not remain, however. There was nothing to hold it any longer. One night, very embarrassingly, he had come home too early. Even in the pain it reminded him of the triteness of the dark-haired woman in the art gallery. When they were alone, he had tried to talk.

"What's the matter, Cova?"

"Oh, go to hell, Bowen, I don't want any sharing of our mutual troubles."

He lit a cigarette. It was very necessary to maintain whatever existed of the situation. "You're not feeling very good, Cova, are you?"

"I don't know, Bowen, we're rotten."

How many times had he asked himself that? "People like us can't afford to go in for labels."

"Listen, Bowen, I'm not afraid of them, I don't mind the words. All right I'm not creative, I'm a bitch. That's still perfectly all right. So I'm a bitch."

He let some ash drop on his pants. Abstractedly, his finger rubbed it in. "I didn't mean that, Cova. I still don't think we're rotten. Maybe we had just a little too much to buck. Maybe two people do suck each other dry."

She had worked one of her shoes off irritably. "Look, Bowen, that's been on the wall for a long time."

He stood up slowly. "And after I leave?"

"I'm sure we'll be even more pointless than ever. . . ."

He did a lot at once after that; he left his job, he moved in with Henry, (feeling the symbolism of it, but he didn't have to pay Henry any rent), and he finished his book, which in one of his recurring moments of anger, he entitled *The Artist in Transit Inglorious*. It was an angry book. Published by a wildcat liberal firm, it made him very little money, but it served as meat for more than a few of the family-newspaper critics. He thought of painting some more, but it seemed a little like a dirty joke to start all over again. He spent a year working from job to job.

A good deal of his time now, he tried to re-evaluate his life. He felt that somewhere along the line he had missed not a turn so much as perhaps a flubbed traffic signal, stopping when he should have moved forward. It seemed to him that in college he had been talented, clever, and even sincere within the limits of his life that he had defined. And it seemed to him that Cova had been that, too. They had not been mismated, and yet they had broken up, because in not believing they had had to expect too much of each other. If they had believed in something outside themselves, it would have been all right, but everything they had been told for the first twenty years of their lives had become on examination a piece of disjunctivity. The form and the matter had not coincided. So that having no end for their life, they had tried to get by on style.

It seemed to him that his life could be compared to the friendly quarrel over an after-dinner check; that when for some reason two people wanted to pay a check, the battle was always fought out by jockeying, so that very rarely would two people both reach at the same time and tear the check. It was like two trucks entering a one-lane junction at the same time. Inch by inch they might try to ride the other out, but unless the stakes were very high, there was never a collision.

Since in his life he had believed in nothing external, he had never found the stakes high enough to collide. By the time he had broken with Cova this had been so ingrained in them, that even then, no great wreckage had occurred. It seemed to him that he had gotten quite far away from anything direct, and that the lack of meaning in his life might be explained by that.

In early 1941 he wrote to his father that he would like to take advantage of his reserve commission to enter the army. A half-year later, he was made (after reinduction school) a captain, by virtue of his age. He thought that the United States would be at war within a short time, indeed, that was why he had entered. He told himself that he had no illusions about the war to come, that his stake was personal.

He had entered the army, because at the end of his recapitulation of himself, he had come to the conclusion that to justify his life, to find some meaning in it would be possible only when he faced death. He remembered Malraux's foundation in dignity. It might be necessary for him to die to find that dignity. Certainly, he thought, life and death and violent action were the fundamentals, and he would find no lie there. He had decided that it was time for him to clutch at the check, even if it were to tear apart in his hands. He had traveled the bridge from sensualism to mysticism, but he preferred it to cynicism. And in the meantime, he wondered like the rest what the feel and sound of actual bullets was like. . . .

❧

Wexler, April 1942, third night

He could just see it in the Freehold papers. . . .

Jewboy, blond Jewboy Wexler perched by the cellar window, tackling Japs with machine-gun bullets, tackling them dead, for the University of Minnesota. Swearing to himself, blond Jewboy Wexler, the Farmer from Freehold, New Jersey, the big blond tackle for the Golden Gophers firing machine-gun bullets, blocking tackling the dirty yellow team from across the tracks in Trenton, doing it for the big football team. The gun bucked away from his hand. Tearing after it, he caught the elusive runner, ran his sights on the incoming interference, hit them low with machine-gun bullets for hands, and got the ball carrier. They were a little team holding off the big team he said to himself, they were a little team, and the big team couldn't get to score.

"Take it easy," Rice, the sergeant, said to him. "You're wastin' your shots."

"Listen, Sergeant, I'm firing this gun."

A grenade splattered unsuccessfully against the outside wall. He started firing again. No half-Indian sergeant was going to tell him how to fight, he was born fighting, playing football for the University of—but he had to correct himself—for the Freehold High football team.

Outside, it had become dark, and the Japs looked like bushes, or like tackling dummies in the evening when practice was over. They were the little team, they were Brooklyn College standing off the University of Minnesota, they were Minnesota standing off the world. "Come on, you Japs, come on, you yellow shirted bastards," he muttered. "Stop holdin', come on, start tryin' to nail me."

Every now and then he could get to see them, especially when they tried to cross the flat football field in front of the house; that was when the moon coming over the house's shoulderguard played him okay, that was when he could see the faces, that was when he could see death slapping them. It was just a spray, he was holding the garden hose on them, giving feed to the hens on the farm, making butter of the Japs. The Indian next to him, feeding, fighting quiet, not talking, he didn't like the Indian, dark, whistling, doing it like it was his business. It wasn't a business, it was a game, the most it was a business was a professional football team. Come on, you Chicago Bears, this is the Philadelphia Eagles, this is the Pittsburgh Steelers, and they're holdin' you on the three-yard line. A gun behind the other goal-post, tried to put its fingers in his eye. He ducked down, feeling the bullets pouring through the window, smacking against the opposite wall back of him. In the distance, he could hear guns going off, this was big, this was being fought all over the island. The machine-gun kept chopping at the back wall.

"I tell you not to fire so much," the Indian said. "You spot them the window."

"Don't fire, Wexler, unless they come within a hundred yards, we can't have them hitting the gun." The captain came out of the trench, wiggled over to the window. "DaLucci, you relieve at the gun in five minutes." A sound of consent came from the dugout. "I don't like the way DaLucci's actin', Captain," the Indian said, "he's too quiet." "You're quiet yourself, Sergeant," Wexler let himself say. "Me?" Rice grunted, "I'm an Indian." The captain smiled slowly. "How many do you think are out there?" he asked. "There ain't many, Cap'n, there's just a coupla platoons." "There's more, Captain," Wexler said. He must have killed thirty of them already.

The captain looked worried. "They need this road, there ought to be more." "Yessir," the Indian said. The guns outside had become quiet, the moon making divots on the field wherever a body lay. Wexler felt caught. At home he had his field, he had the hens and the butter and eggs, he had the place outside Freehold where they played football on Sunday afternoon, the biggest toughest blond Jewboy ever to play football for Freehold High. The cellar was too small, he didn't like bein' caught here. "Yessir, it's a tough war," he said to himself. The captain took out a chocolate bar, broke it in three. They chewed slowly on it. "DaLucci," the captain said, "come up here." The Italian came up slowly, bellied over. The guns of the Japs were still quiet. They were scared quiet, Wexler thought. He focused on a few broken trees at the other end of the moonlit plain. He said to himself that they looked like tackling dummies too, but they didn't. He thought they were too ragged to get away with that.

"I'm afraid the other house may be taken, men," the captain said. He separated a piece of silver foil from his teeth, and dropped it to the ground. "I need the sergeant," he said. "Father Meary obviously cannot be considered. I want one of you men to make a reconnaissance over to it. If you can get in, which I doubt, tell them we need more men. If you can't, come back, and tell me how they're making out. The most important thing is that you get back. The radio here is shot out. Does one of you want to go?"

DaLucci scowled in the darkness. "Naw," he said. Wexler spat softly on his hands. "Why not?" he asked, "I'll make it, Captain." "But get back." He grinned, "You bet, Captain, that's one thing I'm gonna do." The Jewboy running broken-field, the Freehold papers carrying the story.

He was starting out the window, when the Indian held his arm. "Wait," he said. "They're quiet now, they're looking. Stay back yet." Rice fired a few random bursts. The other gun answered, crawling along the outside wall, becoming quiet after a while. "All right, now," Rice said. "Keep to the shadow of the wall as long as you can. When you come to the end, I'll start firing, then run." Jewboy inched his way through the window. The air felt looser outside, and the field seemed enormous as he crawled near the wall, his face close to the ground. He felt excited, this was tough stuff. The air of Tinde was cold suddenly, he could see the trees shivering a little. He shivered too. Hell, he didn't want to be in the papers dead.

Creeping along in the shadow, the wall seemed to go for fifty yards. It was so damn light outside, why couldn't the Japs see him, he could see them. He glanced back at the house. From his angle the window was foreshortened so that he couldn't see inside. It felt very lonely out here, no interference, no tacklers, just the Japs. "This is no damn football game," he muttered to himself.

Coming to the end of the shadow, he paused, crouched into a halfback's position, waiting for the ball. If that Jap machine-gunner ever saw him now, by Jesus. Jewboy Wexler alone in the dark, playing games for keeps. The machine-gun sounded abruptly from the house, cutting white lines into the darkness. The Jap gun answered, both of them throwing blocks; he started running, there was forty yards in the clear, if they ever saw him, it would be like stepping on stunned bugs. He ran. The darkness of the bushes forty yards to the side of the house's shadow came toward him, whipped into his face. He sprawled in them, resting, feeling scared. To be putting eggs in crates now, that was all he asked.

The other house was a mile away, he had to keep off the road. What if all the men, including the captain, were killed back there while he was away, what then? He would be killed with them if he hadn't gone away, he thought. Was Vera making out the invoices for the eggs now, he wondered, was Vera worried about the butter?

On the other side of the bushes, the ground rose and fell in gentle slopes, with enough trees sticking out of it to make it okay for him. He had to cut in back of the town somehow, he'd be caught going through it. Running quickly, from tree to tree, he headed inland. A patrol was coming by, and he stiffened behind a branch. After they passed, he felt the tightness pulsing through his legs. He had to relax; you broke a leg taking back a kick unless you were loose. If he coulda gotten to the University of Minnesota like he'd wanted, then he'd be a captain too, sittin' on his tail sendin' out the privates to see this and to see that. He crawled through some bushes. When he poked his head out the other end, it seemed like a tree was standing with its back to him, only it was no tree, it was a sentry. He lay there waiting for the man to move, but he didn't. Slowly the Jap turned around, then showed his back again. Jewboy Wexler caught in a trap. He waited there, wondering if he should make a sudden tackle. Could he get the guy before he yelled. But he couldn't get himself to do it, the legs gave out first, every good athlete got it in the legs first. Slowly, holding his body an inch from the ground, he began to edge away on hands and toes, one foot back, one hand back, the other foot back. When he was thirty yards away, he stood up in a crouch, and backed into the shadow of a tree. He wanted a cigarette. How the hell was he expected to go over a mile like this and back? In the hills, away from the ocean, a couple of machine-guns were going like all hell. That must be the jungle already, he thought. The coastal road was at his right, but he'd never make it that way, that was where the Japs were fighting.

After a while he started going again, running, crawling at times, gliding from tree to tree. He felt better; this was the longest damn run any man ever made. No Minnesota back ever did this. If only they woulda given him that football scholarship, he'd be back in the cellar now, and DaLucci would be sweatin' here. The hell with the Freehold newspaper, what the hell good would that do Vera and him? They could use that Freehold newspaper for toilet paper. And he almost started giggling. It was soft paper.

He came to the top of a hill, worked his way through the tall grass, afraid to stick his head up. From the next hill, maybe, he could see the other house. It had oughta be away from the town, like the cellar was. He heard Japs laughing, slid on his belly away from them. Something, maybe it was a snake slicked across his face. He almost yelled. When the sound of the Japs came too near, he stopped, wondering how he was to breathe. He didn't have a big Jewish nose, that was one help, and he blew his nose that was another. Minnesota hadn't given him the scholarship cause he was Jewish, but for crise-sakes what was in a name? He had blond hair, didn't he? He was five feet eleven, fast, and weighed one-ninety before a shower. Jewish, hell, in Freehold they said he played like a big Swede. Swede Wexler, he thought, holding his breath. The Japs were passing. Swede

Wexler waited, and then ran, duckwaddling through the tall grass. At the bottom of the hill he had to cross a stream, and his shoes started squishing. After a while, he took them off, and held them in his hand, while he worked his way up the hill. A butter-and-egg farmer, what the hell kind of a life was that for Swede Wexler, he woulda been a pro footballer by now. They'd heard of him all around Freehold, Asbury, Long Branch, he bet Point Pleasant even.

When he came near the top of the other hill, he got excited, he was gonna make it after all. The road and the house oughta be on the other side, but it worried him cause there was no shooting. At the top, he felt his way around some rocks, looked down. The Japs were marching along the road, the house seemed broken in two, he could see a little fire in places from it.

Jewboy Wexler put his shoes on, turned around, and started back. There wouldn't be anything for the papers now, they paid off on touchdowns. There wouldn't be any ads to sign and get money so the mortgage could be paid off in ten years instead of the twenty it was amortized at. It was easier going back, somehow. He kept telling himself not to get sloppy, to keep blocking, or his head'd be off, and they'd be fryin' the fat from it. He wondered what it meant now that the other house was gone. The captain'd know, he guessed, although the captain didn't look on the ball either, but he supposed it was important. He kept tellin' himself to think of Vera cause he might as well think of the best friend a man had which was no dog, you could bet your life on that, but he felt all free and easy now, not scared of being killed, and he didn't need to think of her.

Before he knew it, he was sticking his head out of the bushes, and looking at the house with its windows all filled in, and the cellar under it, where the gun still was firing. He didn't know how to get back in there, he'd have to cross the part where the moon was, and he couldn't signal them to keep the Japs' minds off him. He guessed he'd just have to wait. The guns stopped tangling with each other, and then started again. He remembered that the Japs would be busy firing. There might be a coupla them stickin' out away from the guns, and they might spot him, but he'd have to chance it. He darted across the field in the moonlight. A couple of rifles started banging at him, and then just as he hit the shadow, the machine-gun changed over toward him. He scrabbled for the wall, burrowed into the right angle it made with the ground, hunching his body up, hoping they couldn't see him. He didn't have time to be scared. The damned gun kept spraying around him. They didn't know where he was. The cellar machine-gun wasn't going now. They wouldn't know where the window was. He ran along the wall, dived through the window, almost knocking the gun over, and landed on the ground. The gun started going again, and he crawled up against the wall, breathing as noisy as he felt now, sort of snug against the sand bags.

"Nice goin', kid," Rice said to him. DaLucci was firing now, the captain feeding. The captain made a sign, and Rice took over the feeding. "I wonder they haven't gotten a trench mortar up yet," the captain said. Rice grunted. "They ain't many of them, they just seem to be wantin' to hold us here."

The captain kneeled beside him. "Can you talk yet?"

"Yeah," he said, trying to get control of his heaves, feeling kind of weak and tired all over.

"What happened, what's at the other house?"

"They took it, there's Japs all around, they're marchin' along the road." The captain nodded, whistling tunelessly. "That's the answer, Cap'n," Sergeant Rice said. The captain nodded again. He bent down beside him. "Oh, and say . . . Wexler, ahh . . . what was it like?"

"What?"

"Out there."

"Oh," he shrugged. "All right, I guess. Kinda tough, maybe."

It looked like the captain was going to ask him something else, but he stopped. After a while he asked, "You're sure about the house?" "Yessir," he said. He was getting control of his breath.

All of a sudden he realized that the captain had bellied over to the dugout in the middle of the floor. He was coming back with Father Meary, the two of them crawling up to the wall near the gun. "Keep firing as usual," the captain said, "there's something we have to talk over." They were all huddling around the gun emplacement. "The other house fell, and the Japs are going through on the road. They don't need this house any more. Do you all understand me?" The priest stirred a little. "Do you mean, Captain, that this is no longer an important objective?" The captain seemed to be smiling. "Yes, that's right. . . . Now, they're not going to let us stay here. They don't want any little pockets left. So sooner or later they're going to bring up some small field pieces, and blast us out of here. There's really no point in staying. We might be fighting them on the other road, but I doubt it."

"They didn't look like they was fighting," Wexler said.

"All right. Now I . . . for personal reasons," he halted. "I'm going to stay here. But since I have no right to ask your lives, any of you that wish may surrender. There's no point in heroics in all this. I will not consider it cowardice. Now which of you wants to surrender?"

The priest spoke a little nervously. "You say there's absolutely no point in remaining."

"Too doubtful a one to demand it of any of you."

Rice made a sound of impatience. "I been in tougher spots than this." The priest made a soft sound of indecision. "There will be a lot of captured men, no doubt?" "Yes," the captain said.

"The hell with it," DaLucci said suddenly, standing up, "I'm going. You can frig this goddam war."

"You, Wexler?" the captain asked.

He didn't want to be out in the open again. If they held, maybe he'd be in the papers, maybe. . . . He didn't know what the hell to do. "I'll stay," he said slowly, before he knew it.

"All right, and you, Chaplain?"

Meary got to his feet. "The captured men will have need of me. Captured men need God perhaps . . . more." His lips were trembling. "Are any of you Catholic?" he asked. . . . "Well, God be with you anyway." DaLucci and Meary knelt by the window. "Go out with your hands up," the captain said. "Don't yell, because they won't understand you, and they may think it's a charge." The priest crossed himself. Slipping the gun to the side, Rice put his back to the wall. "So long, you bastard, DaLucci," he said. "Frig yourself," DaLucci said, his short squat form heavy with anger. They went out.

All of them watched from the window. Wexler didn't know how to figure it. He saw them pass into the light, start walking to the Japs. The moon kept catching a piece of their hands. For a moment the priest stumbled, and then went on. They had separated from each other, and walked about ten yards apart. There wasn't any sound from the Japs. They had walked across the entire field almost when the Jap gun started. DaLucci went down first, then the priest. The gun kept playing over them for a few moments.

The first thing Wexler heard was the captain saying slowly, "I never thought of that, I just didn't think of it." A yell of derision came from the Japs. Wexler grabbed the gun. "Let me at those goddam bastards, let me at them, I'll cut their goddam hides off." Rice pushed him away. "Shut up, they had it comin' to them."

"Why, you goddam Indian," Wexler said.

"Shut up, both of you!" It was the captain.

Wexler stopped. The funny thing he kept telling himself was that he didn't really feel sore, he didn't feel much at all.

A Jap soldier came crawling forward cautiously to see if any men were left. Rice bent over the gun, sighting it carefully. He pulled the trigger for just a few bursts, then ran it back and forth on the fallen soldier. He catcalled across to the Japs. "Jeez, they haven't got anything, not even flares. This ain't so bad."

The captain was silent for a few minutes. After a long while he said, "What did DaLucci do before he joined the army?"

"He was a gas-station attendant, I think," Wexler said. "I didn't get to know him very well."

"Yes, I see," the captain said.

"Huh, why sure, sir?"

"All right, start feeding the gun," the captain said to him.

The Japs were holding back now. There just wasn't anything doing. He wondered how long they had been there, maybe three hours, that was pretty long for a little team to hold off a big one. But as he thought it, there kept running something else, and he couldn't keep it back. He didn't know why it was, but he kept thinking that it was more like they were the big team and they were gettin' pushed around by the little one. He didn't know if he believed it or not, but he wasn't sure of anything. He didn't know what to think. . . .

❦

The Captain, April 1942, fourth day 4 A.M.

. . . like men standing in line, naked, waiting to be examined. . . .

He had seen death in many forms during those three days and nights. And to the captain, waiting in the cellar now beside Wexler and the Indian, waiting for the final irrevocable attack, it seemed to him that all his life he had been waiting for his death, and now that it was approaching, there might not be any meaning extracted from it. All day and night, for three days and nights he had been seeing men fighting and dying, and perhaps it had all happened too quickly, but all he knew was that it had no emotion or meaning to him. He remembered the burnt body of a man that he had looked at for quite a time. It had seemed a terrible degradation, as if the man in burning to death had reverted to a prehistoric type. He had been blackened all over, his flesh in shriveling had given the appearance of black fur, and his features, almost burnt off, had been snubbed and shrunken, so that the man's face in death had only registered a black circle of mouth with the teeth grimacing whitely and out of place in the blackness of the ape.

It was not inconceivable to him that his own death could produce a similar violation of his flesh, and yet he felt no emotion from it. It seemed as if for the past three days, he had been numb, numb, not so much from fear, as from a voidity of sensation. Lying in the cellar, his back against a wall, he wondered how long it would be until morning when the Japanese would be able to see the window, and could release a fire through it that would kill any of them trying to answer it. Under that morning fire, he knew, would come Japanese, bellying forward across the plain outside. He wished for a cigarette, knowing he could not smoke one till morning when its light would no longer be dangerous. About him, the Indian and Wexler crouched on either side of the gun, only a small part of their helmets turning the angle of the window. "Stop moving around so much," he heard the sergeant say, then Wexler answering, "I feel itchy."

Now that the forces of his life were approaching this final result, he tried to imagine what his death would feel like, and whether at the very end there would be some all-encompassing sensation. Feeling the night throbbing about him in the dampness of the cellar he was trying to find some resonating quality, some bit of beauty that would have meaning before the final result enacted itself. In this darkness, he was trying, as desperately as his mind would allow, to plumb the content of it, and throw it up against the form of his life. His hand reached out tensely in the night. To achieve the ultimate in his death, to reach out and catch it and pin it up against himself in death—his arm relaxed. It would not be that way. Nor would it be, he thought, in terms of a common denominator, it would be no more and no less of one than a group of men standing in line naked, waiting to be examined.

Wexler stood up and walked away from the machine-gun. In the darkness, the captain could only hear him, but it seemed as if he had felt his confinement, and wanted some sudden release. "Listen," Wexler said, "Sergeant! Did I ever tellya how I got to throw a pass in the Red Bank game one year?" A grunt came from the window. "You know I played guard, you don't even get to handle a football that way, but we had this play see? . . ." The sergeant flexed his feet, "Get away from the window. You never can tell when I can fire this gun."

The captain counted three cigarettes in his pocket. In two hours it might be light enough outside to smoke. Wexler was ranging the blackness with his large feet. He stumbled over something and swore indistinctly. "You see the thing was I could pass. They ain't many guards can do anything with a ball, but ya see I got these big hands. . . ." He reached the other end of the cellar, and headed back for the window, talking slowly. The captain felt a desire to make him stop. "Well, they had this play built around me, where I shift into the backfield"—he moved a few steps sideward in the dark—"making me eligible to hold the ball, see, only it don't go to me, it looks just like I'm protection for the ball carrier, like I pulled out of the line for it, so they ain't worryin' about me." His body moved tensely now—"and then after I miss a block purposely, the ball's whipped over to me, I'm eligible, see? . . ." The machine-gun started suddenly from the window. "Got him," the Indian said.

"So then I pull back, hold the ball up," his arm cocked, "set to throw and. . . ." The Japanese gun answered through the window. Wexler folded slowly, his arm reared back almost to the last.

The captain stood up and, then, knowing the man was dead, sat down more slowly. "I told him, the dumb bastard," the Indian muttered.

"Do you want me to feed the gun for you?" the captain asked.

"It's okay, I can handle it myself. It's kinda quiet now."

They sat there silently. By turning his head and leaning forward a little, the captain could see out the window, and he suddenly understood, now that Wexler had died, a little more what his own death would be like. He doubted if he would feel anything. It would be as casual as Wexler's, with no emotion for him. Too late, it seemed to him ridiculously clear, that emotion could only come from the connotations of experience, and not from the experience itself. Things like first sex experience, if it were unexpected, violent action, death that did not come after a slow sickness, would all give no emotion when they happened. The captain, having experienced the first two, remembered that they had left him numb; the emotion was to come later in tiny quanta until a week or a year later, the remembrance of the experience would arouse a surcharge of feeling in him; at the origin, however, was only the numbness. So that his death, he knew at that moment, would come in casual form without the death orgasm, the instinct for ultimate ecstasy never to be gratified. And to anyone else, his death would be meaningless. To Cova it would be a shock, to his friends, a jar that would merely titillate them because it was expected, perhaps would mean an extra drink at some late hour. To his nation it would be a line in some newspaper, far less interesting than the line about a murdered prostitute. To anyone else . . . he couldn't think of anyone else. Perhaps someone would discover his paintings. He smiled wryly. . . .

He kept coming back to Cova. Little by little a scene was building up for him. And because he could see so much of his own shadow in it, so much of what he might have been if the war hadn't come, he let himself amplify it, not paying any attention to the scattering sounds of battle outside. . . .

He didn't know how she would find out; he supposed, he preferred to have his father call because his father would be ill-equipped for it, and because Cova listening to his stumbling would feel compelled to exhibit some emotion while listening. After she would have cradled the phone, she would go upstairs to her room and lie down to think. She would be living, he thought, in a private house, perhaps a suburb by now, sharing the rent and fornications with a woman perhaps three years older than herself.

Lying in her room, her bed would begin to feel lumpy, and in shifting her position she would begin to cry. There was so much of herself in Bowen; she would feel a little bit as if she had died too. And crying, she would begin to whisper to herself, "I feel rocky as hell, I feel rocky as hell. . . ."

There would be a ring downstairs, and she would remember that she had an appointment that night. The first impulse would be not to answer, but she didn't want to be alone; the second would be to call the date off, but that would be just too damned ostentatious. After a while, she would run downstairs, and catch the man just as he was about to go away.

"I'm sorry," she would say, "I . . . I was just sleeping a little. . . . Come in."

He would be a man of medium height with a dark sensitive face. This would be—let this be his first date with her. He would be very interested in sleeping with her. They had met at a party.

"You've . . ." but he would not say, "You've been crying." He would smile sympathetically, leaving the admission or rejection to her.

She would throw her head back as if to balance the tears on her eyeballs, preparatory to absorbing them. "Oh . . . it's too stupid," she would say. "I just found out that a man I was married to died on some damn island. I used to love him."

He would say, "You must be very unhappy." His voice would be low, in good taste, calculated to serve for emergencies such as this one. Also, he would not have declared himself by the question. He would be finding out more about this woman, and if she held her husband's death in war against his civilian's bed-courtship, he would be turning her thoughts away from himself.

She would smile a little. "Oh, I've got a bad case of nostalgics," (she had coined the word once), "but they always dissolve in cointreau."

"It's difficult to get cointreau, nowadays," he would say. "Perhaps you would prefer to remain at home; our evening can wait for a week or two." He would be thinking that for this evening she would be loving her husband again.

"Oh, no, we must go out," she would say, but the false gaiety in her voice would be misunderstood by him to mean that she wanted to be alone with her rewarmed love, whereas she had made the gaiety false so that he would be indebted to her, and if during the evening she felt a letdown, no compulsion to be witty and entertaining would exist.

The man would make his fatal error here. He would say, "I know how you feel, we would hate each other. After all, while it may be a convention to mourn and stay at home, it is also one to keep one's engagements, and since you must be conventional tonight, it would be better to do what you want, which is, I think, to stay home." He would be thinking that she would remember the kindness, but even more, the insight, so that he could enact his seduction a week later when it would have a certain logical sequence, whereas on this night it would smack too much of a perversion.

She would recognize then that all protestations would only convince him the more, and so she would acquiesce, chat for a few minutes, and then close the door to go back to the empty house. Only now, wanting perhaps a little more to cry, she would not be able to, for the moment had passed, and the situation no longer would warrant it. . . .

He swallowed slowly. There was a painful saltiness in his nose, and he felt a sudden hatred for himself. It was occurring to him that he was emotionally convinced of his death, and he wondered at how far he had come to feel like this, amazed that he felt no fear for it seemed to him that the fear of death must be stronger than anything else in a man's life, and that few were the men who surmounted it. Perhaps, he thought, a few that were really religious or that believed in something hard enough to clamp down on all the other feelings, but he did not know. Perhaps to die for your country, but here the captain felt a rebellion in himself. For a long time, in his moments of reaction against his fate, he had postulated, rather than believed in, he had postulated a something to rail against. And that 'something' had most often been the word America; he would feel sometimes, America has cheated me, but the phrase was uncomfortable; it sounded alien to him, made up perhaps of a self-pity he was not wise enough to realize. For although it might have been true, it was too large a word to attack; it sounded awkward, and perhaps a little cheap in the language of his logic. And yet now, he hated the word America for a moment; he felt that the wreck of his life had come out of himself to a great extent, but he felt also that America had cheated him, had taught him all the wrong things, and had offered him nothing in return. He felt that it had not been strong enough to admit its faults, that when it had made a mistake or was ashamed of something, it had yelled a little louder, and had waved the flag about a little too hard. He did not know, he wanted to believe in her, but he knew that was impossible in the hour or two that remained to him. But for some little part of him, he hoped idly that others would find something there in the next few years . . . that something would come out of the country, and that it wouldn't go hard and selfish as it always had before. But he was very doubtful of this, for he had never learned anything from America to make him feel that anything worthwhile would come after him. He had been told to love God, but to love God beyond the mechanical emotion of the religious ritual was for very few people; he had been told of an equality, but it was only a frame; he had been told of a morality, but finally it was not of the context of its people. . . .

When his book had come out, years before, all the critics had attacked it; they had called it cynical, and cheap, filled with an undue proportion of self-pity and glory, and he, months later, had had to agree with them that in most ways it was.

But one review hurt him terribly. There had been one part in the book that he had written honestly and sincerely; centering about one sentence that had been a summation to him of the futility about him. He was thinking of the war to come when he wrote it, and he had wondered that everybody had not seen it.

Only this review noticed it. He remembered holding it in his hand for a long time. It had read: "There have been cynics, I suppose, less witty, bitterer and less unepigrammatically epigrammatic than Bowen Hilliard. It would be very easy to dismiss Hilliard as another misanthrope, if it were not that the man advertises himself as a sage. After deciphering his key sentence . . . which is . . . 'To die in terms of a subsequent humanity is a form of emotional sophistication that may be achieved only by the people of that nation which puts its philosophy in action' . . . I have been compelled to believe that Bowen Hilliard's book would have been more accurately entitled, *The Artist in Belly-Ache Inglorious*. We have had enough rot these days. . . ."

Soon he could smoke a cigarette, a last futile cigarette of distaste. And yet, amused with himself, there was a hope remaining that it would taste a little better than all the thousands preceding it. He was waiting for the dawn, wanting to see a last day, hoping too that he would feel this dawn more intensely than any that had come before. He heard the Japanese outside, firing, then the Indian answering, then silence once more. The Indian with his neat efficient motions at the gun aroused his interest. For a short while he thought of the Indian and himself in terms of 'they' but he could not feel it. At last he compromised by bellying over to the window, and relieving him of the gun. . . .

❧

The Indian, April 1942, fourth day 5.30 A.M.

Some guys are born to go to whore houses. . . .

The trouble with Rice started when he was adding up his accounts. Perched by the window, his knees bent, feeling the tight roll of his bottom against the backs of his heels, he had just picked off a Jap who was trying to sneak down the side bushes, and in relaxing had thought to himself that that made fourteen he had bagged. Rice knew what he knew, he always used to think that. He knew when he had to hit a guy, and when talking would get him out of it; he knew how to tell when a whore was tired, and if you felt like talking (which wasn't often with Rice) how to pick out the right tired whore. He also knew not to think when thinking made you crazy, which is what made his thinking now so unusual.

He'd been trading bursts with the Japs every ten minutes or so, feeling it was the slack season. Naturally, he'd been fighting so long in so many places, he had gotten to the point where if he wanted to think he could do it while he fired a gun. And he had been telling himself with pride that of the Japs that had been killed, he had knocked off thirteen out of fifteen as near as he could tell. He had to admit that he'd been firing the gun more than Wexler or DaLucci, but then they'd gotten killed which'd meant no one spelled him at the gun. And he knew that your accuracy went down when you were tired. So it all balanced out, except that he couldn't figure what percentage thirteen out of fifteen was. He tried for awhile to work that out, but he quit school too early at the Indian reservation in Oklahoma ("Where whores were born," he used to say sometimes), and he didn't have much luck. He was also thinking that they'd held out for pretty long, although the Japs only had one machine-gun and no flares. The thing was they hadn't gotten any more guns because the main body was probably halfway to Tinde by now, he guessed.

He was estimating about how, for an afternoon and a night, they had killed off fifteen Japs to only three of theirs, and how at the very worst the last profit-and-loss would be fifteen to five. This was where the trouble came in. He stopped. He realized he'd been figuring himself in the five. That meant they got him, the Indian. It hit him that way, he hadn't figured on being killed since . . . since, Jesus, since the first World War. He'd been eighteen, and it had been in Belleau, or wasn't it? . . . All he remembered was that he'd been sick and scared, and now although there was something in his stomach, it wasn't anything like that. He felt kinda surprised almost, he just never figured it that way. With the things he'd done, the Marines in Nicaragua, Bolivia on his own, rum-running in New Orleans, somehow he'd kinda forgotten that you stood a chance of dying too. . . . He kept wondering what it would be like.

He had felt like talking; it had been a tired whore that night. Except that when he'd been in the room with her, sitting on the soiled blanket, batting his eyes against the glare from the bulb naked-looking in that room, he hadn't been able to say much at all.

They smoked a couple of cigarettes. It wasn't that she was pretty, he hadn't found many pretty whores, but there was something about her that moved him back three years, or up ahead to what he would do if they gave him a grand out of nowhere one day, no strings attached.

Finally she said: "You're a funny guy," (one thing was she didn't use 'dearie',) "you never talk much."

He blew his smoke out. "I'll tell ya somethin'." He paused. She nodded at him to go on. He felt queer. "I had a lot of girls in my day, for a long time, but none of them was amatures. I paid on the line every time."

She still nodded, still receptive. "I tried to think it out once. I ain't a good-lookin' guy, but I'm awright. I finally figured it out that I started too late. The first time was at twenty-two, New Orleans, I think."

She lay back on the bed. "That could be it, of course," she said, "but I dunno, darling, the way I see it is just that some guys are born to go to whore-houses."

He felt dumb for talkin'. "Yeah, that's it," he said, and left soon after.

For a while he was busy shooting the gun off, and that took his mind off his troubles, as shooting a gun always did, but there was something uncomfortable in the back of his head all this while, and the first lull there was, it popped back again to him that he was going to get his, come two three four hours. That was all right, of course, you didn't live forever, but at the same time, he had the damn craziest feeling thinking about death, because he just couldn't guess what it was like. He knew you didn't think any more, that was obvious, but, you . . . you just didn't do anything after that. It was just the end. He fired his gun viciously, ducking down as the return came back. That meant . . . no more. It was like wrestling trying to figure that out, only with your head.

He wanted suddenly to know why the hell he was gonna get his. He just wanted to know what it was all about. They called him Creepy Joe around the army camps, and said he knew all the answers 'cause he never asked questions. But he had to ask questions now, because he was buying something that cost a lot. He'd never asked what the fightin' was about; fightin' was his business, and you didn't ask questions if business was good, but now he kinda liked to know. The papers said Freedom, and he guessed maybe they were right because that was something they knew about, just like he knew about whores, but Freedom. . . ? Did it figure with a slug in the belly . . . he didn't know . . . and by now, he was damn sure he wanted to know. He wanted it put in words. He wasn't scared of dying, but he wanted it down on paper, some of the reasons anyway. Anyway, he wanted, that in the fifteen-to-five ledger, there would be a remark after his name. He'd never thought that way before, but he could see it now, a business ledger, all written in, like the mess sergeant used, with something after his name, Thomas Rice, the Indian.

He felt a hand tugging at his shoulder. It was the captain, "I'll take over the gun now." He crawled away, propping his back against the wall. For about ten minutes, he just sat there thinking. He shoulda known enough not to think when thinking didn't do any good, but he couldn't keep from it this time. After a while he crawled back to the machine-gun. The captain hadn't fired in a long time. He fingered a couple of bullets in their jackets before he spoke to him, "It's getting light out, Captain." He felt funny, he was talking just for the talking. The captain turned towards him. "They've brought another machine-gun up. They're not moving, so I haven't fired." He felt himself nodding, feeling more like talking than he had in a long time. The captain said, "I think they'll wait till it's light out, they only have twenty minutes, and they can take it safe." He saw the captain slap at his breast pocket. "We'll be able to have a cigarette soon," he was saying. The Indian felt uncomfortable. "Of course, there's a chance," he said, "we might have knocked them back; maybe we got a patrol coming up or something." "Yeah, there's always a chance," the captain said to him. They were silent. He felt himself having to speak, and he couldn't understand it.

"Think they'll win this island?" he asked.

"I never thought we had a chance to keep them from winning here. They had more time to get ready."

He nodded. He could have answered that himself . . . but . . . "Do ya think we'll win the war?" he muttered suddenly.

The captain took so long in answering, he wished he hadn't asked it. "I think so," he said finally. "We're taking a licking now, but we've only been fighting four months." He went silent again. "Yes, I think so," he repeated. "We have more men and materials, and you know, our allies are pretty good."

"Yeah," Rice said. He felt balked somehow. Not knowing what to do he took out his pistol. "Well, what are we. . . ." but the question was too damn lousy. "We *gotta* win, don't we?" he asked. "Yes, that's the thing," the captain said, "we're fighting because we can't lose."

He felt at his buckle. "That's all?" he asked. "Just because we can't lose? Isn't there anything else?" He felt just too damn dumb, but the questions hurt him until he got them out.

"I don't know; it's too early in the war yet," the captain said.

"Well, what about us, we're goin' to have to die, because we can't lose. . . . I don't know, I want more than that."

"That's all there is," the captain shouted, his voice going hard. "Now shut up!"

It didn't matter any more whether he talked. He saw the captain's face pulsing, and he didn't want to hear him speak. The captain got control of himself. "We're dying alone, Sergeant, that's all."

"I'm sorry, sir," he said.

They could see each other's faces by now. Across from them the bushes were beginning to change from black to green. "They'll be over very soon, Captain," he said. He just felt tired, that was all. "The trouble with you, Sergeant," the captain said, his voice drawn out thin, "is that you think it is one of man's inalienable rights to have a little idealism with his death. You wouldn't mind that, would you, Sergeant?"

"No, I don't know what. I'd like a cigarette, sir."

They lit them away from the window, cupping their hands. The captain came back and felt at the gun. "The sun's starting to show," he said. "We really ought to get the trench mortar out." As he spoke, the Jap gun fired at them again, and they both ducked. The captain peered around the side of the window. "It's going to be one hell of a sun," he said.

"Yes," the Indian answered slowly, "sometimes you want to look pretty carefully at it."

MARJORIE STENGEL

Goodbye, Goodbye!

When the girls were young and both working behind the counters of department stores, selling respectively ladies' collars and men's gloves, everybody used to say: "Aren't they sweet girls? Not pretty, but they certainly are sweet. And the way those two get along! Just like two turtle-doves, aren't they?"

The Niles girls worked hard. They were go-getters. They forged along. When they were in their thirties, Mary was assistant buyer of dresses in the department store where she had started at the men's-gloves counter, and Henrietta was assistant manager of a Madison Avenue dress shop. That was before the war. That was in the depression era, when jobs were scarce and things were hard. But those Niles girls were getting along fine.

They had a little apartment in the west Sixties. About that time, people were knowing either one or the other. People were saying: "No, I don't know Henrietta. I know the other one—Mary. A very nice person. A very clever girl. Holds down a wonderful job." Or else they were saying: "I only know Henrietta. She's a little affected. Sort of patronizing. Maybe they get that way after a while from working on Madison Avenue."

The reason people said that was because Henrietta had acquired a kind of swanky East-of-Fifth-Avenue drawl. Mary was still over on Seventh Avenue, and if you heard the two of them together you wouldn't believe they were sisters.

They got ahead. They moved down to the Gramercy section. People began to know them together. People were coming down to visit them in that apartment with its soft grey walls and tasteful furniture and a colored maid serving a good dinner. At that time the girls were nearing their forties. They were pulling down good salaries, shopping in nice stores and looking trim and smart all the time. Just about then, people began to say: "I wonder why those Niles girls don't get married. A man who got either one of them would be lucky. It's a shame. Two nice girls like that. Smart, too."

Most of the comments came from other women; their circle of acquaintance ran to the female side. What with being a buyer for one of the big chains, Mary met a lot of men, only she just saw them in a business way. And Henrietta just didn't meet men, especially not at her job. She was still selling, this time in one of the Fifty-seventh Street shops, where all her customers were either movie actresses or mistresses of bankers or society women or very successful lady writers. It was the kind of place where they called her "Miss Henrietta" and where Henrietta confidentially made little whispered suggestions about what they ought to have, sort of a secret ravishment behind nicely manicured hands, with words in *piano* or *pianissimo*. It had its bit of glamour all right. There she was all day, rubbing elbows with those kinds of people, at the same time, of course, learning a lot about clothes and smartness. Soon she never once slipped when it came to the broad A in her conversation. It just came natural. Also, she began to wear things like a dress just-plain-dead-black, nothing but lines on it and maybe a string of pearls. Either the pearls were really good or else they certainly looked it.

They were getting along fine. Some of the lady buyers would come in for dinner, or maybe one of the girls from the Fifty-seventh Street shop. They talked about what the stores were showing or a dress or suit that one of them had ordered, or they discussed maids some of them had, or maybe talked about different cities versus New York, since some of the buyers were from out of town. They also talked about their favorite corsetieres, or a new place where one of them had got a marvelous permanent wave, or maybe the new musical comedy that some of them had seen and some hadn't, or a new diet that someone one of them knew had lost thirty-five pounds on.

On the nights when they were home alone, Henrietta would sit in the big red chair, turning the pages of the evening paper with her thin fingers, and Mary would stretch out on the couch in a housecoat. Maybe Henrietta would say, "I'm so *weary* tonight. I can't imagine why but I'm *simply* exhausted!" But she would sit there just the same, very trim and groomed and dignified, because she always had the feeling that maybe someone was going to walk in. Mary would lie on the couch in a housecoat or lounging pajamas, listening to the radio and pressing the palm of one hand over her eyes. Maybe Mary would say, "Christ, my feet are killing me. Here I am, leading a dog's life for the sake of a few bitches and what they're going to wear!"

The evenings at home like that, just lying around being tired and all aching bone and flagging spirit, stretched one into the other in minute, imperceptible overlappings. Henrietta would do the crossword puzzle, her head a little sideways in a listening attitude because she was so sure the bell was going to ring and someone was going to come, and then maybe she would take an apple from the fruit dish the maid fixed before she left every night. She would spread a cocktail napkin neatly over the lap of her all-lines black dress and carefully peel an apple. Mary would watch her sitting there eating the apple and maybe humming the song the radio was playing and everything was all right. But sometimes Henrietta would just sit there staring at the opposite wall, with a dreamy sort of look on her face. When Mary saw this, she always had a feeling that Henrietta was thinking about getting married—thinking about Albert—and then a strange, unhappy worry would start to float above her fatigue. She would look over at her sister and see certain signs of age, see a new primness stealing over her that made her look like an old maid. That would start her mind off on a path of all kinds of sad pitying thoughts, and then she would remember that she herself was three years older than Henrietta. She would be frightened and restless. She would think that maybe the next day she would go on a diet and lose ten or fifteen pounds. Maybe go to Elizabeth Arden. She would also think about what they were going to do with their summer vacation that year when it came around. She would fall into a dream herself, her mind busy with boats and new places and perhaps meeting someone.

It was like a routine. Quite a few times when this sort of thing happened, they both fell asleep. Then one of them, cramped and at odds with time, would suddenly see the little desk clock saying twelve-thirty or later. She would wake the other, in a tender, half-shy way, and they would go in to bed. They would yawn. One of them would say, smiling, in a voice still full of scratchy sleep, "I must be getting old." Otherwise, they would not speak much, each pretending not to have seen the other dreaming.

They left for work together in the morning. Henrietta would take the bus and Mary would walk over to the subway, but for a moment they would stand out in front of the house, saying goodbye at the beginning of each day. They were both very tall, with long skinny feet encased in sensible oxfords with special built-in arches. Mary was even taller than her sister, so tall that she lumbered a little as she hurried off with her briefcase under one arm. She was big and broad and she stooped a little; her neck was always sunk into the fur of her coat collar. When she was in school, long ago, with the great expanse of her white middy standing at the end of the line and a longing in her heart to be small like the others, she had looked like a sorrowing tree in winter bending down to weep its tears right into the earth. She still looked a little like that, even with the two balls of rouge on her cheeks that were like two left-over blossoms on a dying vine.

Henrietta, sticking out a stiff arm as signal to the bus-driver to stop, was more like those tall old-fashioned racks for hanging coats and derbies. She zealously kept her size down to a fourteen, and in her forties she was beginning to have a spareness, a kind of sharp lean look. Sometimes, when she stood on the corner waiting for the bus, she looked like the dark thin wraith that is always "The Wind" in modern prints and woodcuts.

There was someone who came up to the house for dinner three times a week. Albert. Albert was a gynecologist, and maybe that is why he felt at home there, even on the nights when maybe four or five lady buyers were up. At first, he was neither Mary's nor Henrietta's friend, but after a while Mary was hardly civil to him and then he was Henrietta's friend. Over a year ago he had come to visit with someone they both knew, and after that he just kept coming. If he could make it for dinner he came for dinner, otherwise he dropped in later in the evening. Mary soon got to know that that was whom Henrietta was expecting to ring the bell when she sat there with that listening attitude.

Albert was a very short, almost wizened person, with a few grey hairs still left on his head, a thin mouth and glasses which he had a way of peering over the tops of, which gave him a rather treacherous, suspicious look. He had poor table manners, and Henrietta with her broad A kept trying to do something about them. "Oh, *Bert,*" she would say in a tired petulant way, "here's a bread and butter plate." Or, when he tried to use the same spoon for different things, "You could have waited, Bert. Ruby would bring you another spoon." Or "Look out, Bert! Be careful! You're going to spill that gravy on the tablecloth!"

That went on night after night and week after week, and sometimes Mary would say impatiently, "Oh, what difference does it make? Let him alone!" Albert would look over his glasses at her and smile gratefully and go right on spilling the gravy or spitting in his napkin or doing any of the other things. For a minute, Henrietta would sit and sulk over her plate and not say anything, but soon she would start all over again. Bert liked it when the two sisters argued over him like that. He would sit there eating and smiling and snorting in a pleased sort of way, feeling very manly between the two of them. He liked that better than when Mary just sat there not saying anything and not liking him and looking at him in a rather accusing way. When she did that, something in her disdain almost frightened him.

For the first few months when Albert had started to visit them, Mary was secretly pleased. She thought of him optimistically in regard to Henrietta. She thought that maybe one of those days he was going to want to marry Henrietta. But after he had been coming for a year, the thought was carried away in the stream of time. It didn't even occur to her any more. When she came in and found Albert reading the paper stretched out on the couch, or when she wanted to hear one of the comedians on the radio and he wanted to listen to a prize fight, she didn't even argue. She didn't even greet him when she came in. He was like one of the chairs in the living-room. Just there. The maid got in the habit of almost always setting his place at the table on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. In the year that he had been coming there, he had taken them both to the movies two or three times. And once he had taken Henrietta out. To the six-day bicycle races at Madison Square Garden.

That's how things were going along. Fine. They had that apartment and they had those jobs and they were both paying into the kind of insurance policy that would give them security when they were too old to work. The lady buyers were coming up to visit and Albert the gynecologist was coming, and the seasons were changing, easily and quickly and unnoticed, like scenes being shifted in a theater and it suddenly being the third act after the first two have gone.

One day Henrietta lost her job. In the afternoon they called her in and told her about cutting down and, to be quite frank with her, telling her how they had to keep the younger girls on because the customers liked them better. Henrietta got her hat and coat and left and stood outside in the afternoon sunshine watching the people and buses ply along Fifty-seventh Street and feeling very strange about being out at that time of day during the week.

It was one of those beautiful spring days, the kind of day that is full of self-love and self-admiration and seems to stand still, gazing in a mirror and marveling at its own brilliance and perfection. Henrietta was completely confused and bewildered because it had all been done so quickly. Just a while before she was in the store working, as she had for the last twenty-five years, and now there she was, standing outside in the afternoon with nothing to do and a strange empty feeling in the region of her knees.

"Shall I get you a taxi, Madame?" said the uniformed doorman who stood outside of the store. He was mixing her up with the customers and that gives you an idea of how smart she looked. She shook her head and started to walk over to Fifth Avenue. She was about to do the same thing she always did when she left the store, climb on a downtown bus and go home.

It was strange and paralyzing to see the sun shining in her eyes and breathe in the smell of city afternoon and see a few pieces of paper blowing on the street and be able to read the printing on them. It was new and amazing to step into the first bus that came along and see all the empty seats and not have to push her way in, or wait in a little befuddled futile crowd while the bus went past proudly with all its seats taken. She put in her dime and had gone about six blocks when she decided to get off.

She retraced her steps slowly, looking in the store windows and marveling at the people jostling past her, quickly gone like the scenery that flicks by a train window. At Fifty-ninth Street she turned into the park and sat down on the first bench she came to, feeling embarrassed at being there, with time dragging about her in bewildering slowness.

She was there for almost an hour, listening to the murmur of afternoon and trying in a heartbreaking way to think about her own life up to that moment, fingering into the past diffidently, reaching out for a logical chain and sequence that had led up to the present. It was the strangest thing how difficult it was to do this. The reason was that time for her had never been marked off into joyous landmarks and events; instead, it was like water lapping softly against the post of a pier and leaving its green mark of time. Unnoticed, unremarked and silent, its age was suddenly there, to be determined, but not to be traced back to the moment of its beginning.

To the passing person entering the soft open mouth of the park, she was simply a thin dark woman sitting there primly on a bench, and even if he were to look closely enough to see the tears rolling down her cheeks, he would not have thought it was anything more than a mote of dust that had flown into her eye, or perhaps from cold, because after a while the wind became a sound with the first notes of dusk in it.

Mary said it was all right. She said her sister didn't have to worry. "For heaven's sake," she said, "cheer up! You'll find something else. It isn't as though you were going to be turned out in the street." It was something new happening. It was almost nice having this to talk about. This new, unlooked-for event brightened up the table. The lady buyer who was up that night was quite incredulous. "The bastards!" she said. "The dirty bastards! Letting you out like that without a minute's notice!" Albert, too, was considerably cheered. He helped the lady buyer along. "The skunks!" he amended.

Their words fell about Henrietta like little pebbles. She hardly heard them. Carefully, as though she had never seen them before, she was fixing small things in her mind. The flower wreath in one corner of her plate. The design of the blue and yellow wallpaper in the dinette. The highlighted twirls of the damask cloth. The palm of her own hand lying upturned in her lap. A tiny piece of carrot caught in Albert's necktie. Mary's fingers around the bone-handled carving knife poised above the roast. And later, the crumbs of chocolate cake left on the dessert plates, the piece the lady buyer left looking like a half-washed-away embankment. The brown circle at the bottom of her coffee cup. The napkins limp and deathlike beside each place, Mary's with a bright streak of red from her mouth.

What Henrietta was still doing was what she had begun in the park, the contemplation of her life and the past. She was not finding much more than the emptiness of carefully charted time.

At first it was the same. All the way into June they were leaving together in the mornings, standing outside and saying goodbye at the beginning of each day, wearing smart, subdued spring suits, Mary lumbering off to the subway, Henrietta slowly mincing to her bus.

"Stay in bed," Mary would say those first few weeks. "Why get up so early?" she would ask as she fastened the hooks of her corset. "I wish I could have a little vacation. Boy, what I could do with some sleep in the morning!"

But Henrietta clung to her routine. Morning after morning, the alarm blasted her out of sleep. "I'll run up to see So-and-So," she would tell Mary. Or "I think I'll stop in and see So-and-So. She's been begging me to come back."

And then suddenly the city collapsed into summer. The morning already had a breathless, gasping feeling. Even at the early hour when they emerged from the house, the sun was toying with the sidewalks, already scorching them with its hot breath. One morning, Henrietta stood there watching Mary go off with her stooping stride, and a great listlessness froze her into stillness. It was like a tremendous relaxation that came suddenly after weeks of being out too early and not finding anything. It made her turn and go back upstairs. Before she knew it, she was in the elevator going up to their floor and turning the key in their apartment door.

The desk clock said quarter to nine. A brilliant rectangle of sunshine was lying on the blue carpet of the living-room. She stood there looking at it in a surprised way and knowing that she was no longer going out to see people in the mornings or any other time. Somewhere she had heard something about blue fading in the sun, so she went over and pulled down the blind. The room took on a shadowy cell-like quality. It had the smell that a room has in the morning, the scent of leftovers and staleness, being composed of things from the night before. She sat down on the couch, still wearing her gloves and hat and looking trim and smart, listening to the summer sounds from outside—an ashcan being flung down on the street, a thin whistle hanging in the air like a kite, the deep rumbling undertone of life and traffic, the screech of a radio somewhere in the building.

Mary said one night, "Maybe we ought to let Ruby go. We don't need a maid as long as you're home all day. Anyhow for the summer. There really isn't much to do in a place like this. Having someone in once a week ought to be enough." The way she said it showed that she had been giving the matter some thought.

In the beginning, Henrietta wore the cotton dresses she had from last year's cruise. When she washed dishes she was careful about creaming her hands and wearing rubber gloves and watching her nails. But the limp drowse of summer heat was on everything. It engulfed her. It was simpler and cooler and less taxing to wait until the rooms were gone over before she dressed. At two or three in the afternoon when she fixed her lunch, she would still be wearing her nightgown. After a while, she didn't even notice a broken fingernail or the raggy look of the cuticle. About that time, people started to say, "Yes, the Niles sisters. Isn't Henrietta the one who keeps house for her sister?"

The lady buyers weren't coming any more in July. It was too hot. No one was going anywhere. There was only Bert. He was still coming for dinner. He took them to air-cooled movies. At the table, Henrietta was saying, "Can't you at least *try* to be a gentleman? Do you *have* to take off your coat, Bert?"

Mary would say petulantly, "Oh, let him alone. Take off your vest too, Bert. You might as well be comfortable."

The oppressing night air would heave its weight in, like a fat lady with bundles going up a flight of stairs. Sometimes Mary said, "Oh, shut up! It's so damn hot I don't blame him."

The two sisters would look at each other, their eyes full of bitterness and the beginnings of hate.

Those moments were like the sharp ripping cry of muslin being torn, they had the acrid sadness of smoke on a winter sky. Alone all day, Henrietta would think sometimes of going away. But she had slipped too far into a wordless menial position that chained her there, even while she was thinking of leaving. Quickly quickly each day had its focal point, its habit, its design. The hours turned one into the other, and in a resigned way she let them pass over her like a stream. But each night as the clock neared six, some frightened melancholy would bloom inside of her like a dark fungus growth. Each time she heard her sister's key in the lock, a quick panic would mount in her and die. She watched Mary breathless then, as one watches a figure bobbing about on a thin tight-rope far above the earth, waiting for the moment of safety and peace, or with the wild scream ready in the throat for the moment when the figure would slip and fall and come tumbling groundward.

Mary's vacation came at the end of August. She was taking a cruise and it was strange to see her packed trunks in their bedroom and not be a part of this going away. It was the first time in about twenty years that they weren't taking their vacations together.

Henrietta had handrolled the hems of some of Mary's dresses. She had done most of her packing. She made timid birdlike comments and did a great deal of tight, unhappy smiling. Once Mary said, "Why don't you come? We can easily get another reservation." But she couldn't. Too many of her thoughts in the last few months had dealt with dollar signs divided into time.

The morning had a brown-yellow cast to it. The air was sultry and humid with the heavy rumbling of a possible summer rain. Mary and Henrietta and Albert went to the boat. In the cab Mary sat with her face turned away, looking out of the window intently as one does at new scenery speeding by. Just before they had left, she had said, "Why bother coming to the boat? You really don't have to. It's so hot."

They were very quiet all the way to the pier. Even Albert was uncomfortable. How was Henrietta to know that her sister was simply frightened at the prospect of her first voyage alone?

The cabin with its ship smell enclosed them. Albert produced a package in white paper. "I brought some scotch," he said feebly. They had a drink. They talked about A deck, B deck, C deck, and where she was going to sit in the dining-room. It was frightful until there was the robust sound of the lady buyers who had come down in a group to see Mary off. After they came, there were lots of jokes, and then in a group they walked about the ship.

At the last moment, just before they had to go ashore, the sisters said goodbye. They couldn't help crying. After all, it was the first time they weren't going away together. "Goodbye, goodbye!" the lady buyers were saying. "Have a wonderful time!" Their voices were loud, coming from deep in their chests right above their tight girdles. The perspiration was streaming down their faces from the effects of saying goodbye and the humidity of the air and the scotches they had drunk in the cabin.

"Goodbye," Henrietta said tearfully, her face pulled into a strange shape with the grief she was feeling.

Mary put her arms around her, kissed her forehead and left the red streak that was always on her napkin at home. "Goodbye, darling," she said, hugging her, "I'll miss you terribly. If I've been hellish lately—"

The going-ashore warning came to all of them. Like obedient sheep they trooped down the gangplank.

"You'd better go now," Mary said to Henrietta, with much the same gesture with which she used to push her into classes at school, or to the grocery store. She was too frightened about being alone on this trip to say anything else.

Albert had vanished in the crowd on the pier. She looked about but there wasn't a sign of him. The people stood around her with the vacant look of farewell on their faces. Some of them raised handkerchiefs and waved them in jerky up-and-down motions. Some of them called out in recklessly optimistic tones to the proud ship ready to pull away and make its shining departure out of this pastel day. Henrietta stood there looking out, too. But not at the ship where Mary was. Not at the grey water under the opaque sky. She was watching a single gull dipping and then swooping cloudward.

It was just a little after noon when she got back to the apartment. Just in time too, because an August storm was breaking and crackling over the city. The sky had a swollen look. With its yellow tinge it was like a festering sore.

It was strange how the house seemed full of sadness and departure when she opened the door. It had a barrenness, a strangeness, although nothing at all was missing or changed for this time of day. The curtain was flapping in and out of the living-room window. Already the big blotchy raindrops were falling out of the sky. She was going to close the window, but there was a breeze that came into the room like a blessing. She knotted the curtains and closed the window only half-way and stood there, letting the rain blow in and not noticing. She looked down at a wet black rooftop below her and she put out her hand to feel the rain on it. In her mind she saw the speck of ship, departed, gone, a spot in the distance, very small, like an object seen through the wrong end of an opera glass. And it was curious, the way she didn't feel lonely. Instead, she was suddenly swept with a great feeling of freedom and liberation.

She stood there smiling. She stood there watching the rain for almost three hours, and her head was turned a little sideways in the listening attitude of waiting for the sound of the doorbell, even though she knew that no one was coming. She stood there for almost three hours, seeing the little vanishing ship and thinking of the past and searching for the chain that led up to the present, and watching the rain. And then she pushed up the window as far as it would go and jumped out.

After that, when people were talking about them, they said, "Oh, the Niles girl. The one whose sister killed herself."

LENORE G. MARSHALL

Flashlight

Tonight the lap of waves sliding in on the beach hardly rose to the veranda; all sound was embraced and confined below by the perpendicular cliffs that tumbled roughly from house to shore. It was a warm midsummery gentle night, so dark that the sandy trail and stepping stones of the hill merged with encroaching boulders and brambles; only the deep blue sky mapped by sharp stars was distinct and the windows of the little shingled salt-box house, gold oblongs with lamps alight inside.

The lamps were kerosene. Tim Crane went primitive on his vacation. So Mrs. Forrester, his mother-in-law, went primitive too. Luckily however her trusty flashlight was tucked away safely in the desk drawer behind her. She was feeling nervous about the lamps and candles for everyone, particularly Tim, pushed around in the crowded room with no thought at all of fires. Most of the group sat on the floor since there was an insufficient number of chairs or they got up and danced to the static of the radio. Tim strode over to a corner where he mixed drinks and as many women who could get near him drifted to the same corner. Somehow or other he had lost the cocktail shaker and was using a milk bottle. When he put it down, wet with alcohol, on the varnished table Mrs. Forrester could not restrain a distressed warning. "It will leave a ring, Timmy!" she called, regretting it as soon as she had spoken but as usual he acted as though he had not heard. Mrs. Forrester turned to see if anyone had noticed. "The landlady's furniture," she explained brightly to a young man beside her. "That Tim!" She wished to add, "You know they say a hero isn't a hero to his butler. It's the same to his mother-in-law," but she thought of it too late; the young man had already moved away and just then Tim knocked over a glass which broke. Not having possessions of her own Mrs. Forrester minded such episodes although why should *she* bother?—for everything was Tim's, his rented summer cottage, his car, his liquor, his favorite food, his friends; she didn't so much mind that everything belonged to him as that he lost or broke everything. Even Mrs. Forrester perforce was his.

Mrs. Forrester's hair had been dyed back to its original color, dark chestnut, because that way she felt better equipped, but repeated chemicals had made it bushy and cottony, like brown mattress-stuffing at large around her pinched and shrunken features. Her hair marked her as rather a character, it proclaimed that this was what she could make of herself in spite of the passage of time, it was intended as a sign, gallant, undaunted, it grew out prominently in a matted nest, giving the lie to the startled wan old bird face within. She went everywhere with the Cranes. At parties she sat on the last chair and nobody wanted to talk to her. She would be animated and strive to do her share but the others, all younger in years although, she told herself firmly, no younger in interests, after the first scrupulous politeness with which they addressed her, became absent-minded; they would hunt with their eyes for an escape around the room saying "Excuse me just a moment." She might sit alone with no one beside her for as much as ten minutes at a time but not relaxed, not resigned, not able to play the part of elderly philosophical onlooker in spite of her detached smile, secretly deeply embarrassed and under a strain waiting for a chance to get into things. One enjoyed being in things. But it was as though Tim deliberately excluded her. Setting the pace as a tornado might, when he wanted to argue people all argued, when he wanted to dance they all danced, but he had a way of rarely hearing Mrs. Forrester, addressing her only when necessary, never calling her by name, which made her feel as though she did not quite exist. Of course he was not actually rude. On the contrary Tim was the soul of courtesy and boisterous good humor toward everyone, very popular; only he and she knew about his blank innocence of her presence and that this was in revenge for her sin of being there and dependent upon him. She was always doing her best to placate him.

"My son-in-law's recent brilliant success," she would remark to their guests, giving little fidgety preening pats to her spectacular mop of thick hair, making a careful point of discussing Tim's work. "You've heard about my son-in-law's latest discovery in chemistry, haven't you? A great contribution! They've just made him a full-fledged professor at Harvard. Full-fledged." At least there was an inner satisfaction in letting him thus hear her showing appreciation of him, expatiating upon his experiments to whoever would listen. "What he's getting at in his laboratory is this," Mrs. Forrester always explained. She could have taken great delight in these conversations since she had a sort of inside track to the scientific world, a favored position through her relationship to Tim, had it not been for her constant foolish fear of him.

Mrs. Forrester looked across the room and for the life of her she didn't know why she had called out so impulsively about a little thing like the alcohol stain, wondering whether she had offended him in public. At last she managed to catch Tim's gaze after hard staring and she flashed him a smile.

"Anything I can do, Timmy?" she called.

Tim Crane was talking to handsome Mrs. Boris. He continued undisturbed, leaning over the girl in the chair. His wide shoulders, that gave elegance even to a sports shirt, twitched very slightly; he laughed at some remark of the girl's with extra hilarity.

The kerosene lamps made it hotter, and the tobacco-filled overcrowded room gave one a sense of breathing in something solid. Mrs. Forrester fluffed out her dark youthful hair, sitting erect on a stool, her spine prodded by the desk drawer. Things were untidy and upset by this time, what with the cocktail shaker lost, books fingered and put back in the wrong places, rugs pushed aside, that alcohol ring on the table at the other end of the room. Tim's wife, somehow diminishingly Mrs. Forrester's daughter, curled in the alcove, talking quietly, as though she were trying to hide. A gust of warm wind blew in through an open window, bent a candle flame. A very good thing indeed, Mrs. Forrester decided, that she had thought to conceal her flashlight in the desk before people came. One could never tell when a flashlight would come in handy; besides, this was her own flashlight, bought with her own money, not in any way Tim's. It was a particularly good one, too, reliable, with a powerful bulb. It gave a sense of security to have a thing like that within reach of one's bed at night, in a tinder box house like this one. Tim could keep his candles and lanterns, which were all very well for a man with no imagination about what might happen; anyway this was his house, if he wanted candles, of course that was his privilege.

"Anything I can get you?" Mrs. Forrester called out helpfully to young Mrs. Boris, who was lounging in the deep chair across the room. "A sandwich? Did Timmy offer you another drink?"

Tim got up. "What about a midnight swim?" he proposed to the room in general. "That's what I need on a hot night like this. Who's coming?"

They began to stir from sofas and cushions on the floor. For heaven's sakes, what nonsense, thought Mrs. Forrester, but she held her tongue.

"Wonderful idea," people were saying, dubiously at first, then more gayly. Tim's wife, Mrs. Forrester's daughter, jumped to her feet.

"How energetic!" sighed young Mrs. Boris. "Swell!" cried a stout, perspiring man.

"Everybody coming?" Smiling and commanding Tim stood among them, in the center of the disordered room.

"It's dark on the hill," a girl called from the veranda. "We'll break our necks on this path. What do you do about your rocks, Tim?"

"Who's got a flashlight?" Tim asked. He began rummaging around the room, pushing magazines and glasses about. "I lost mine." He laughed in amusement at himself, Mrs. Forrester sat quietly on her stool against the desk, watching them get ready with kindly interest.

"We've got to have some light on those rocks," said Tim, still shoving at things. "Damned if I know where I put mine. You have a flashlight?" he said suddenly to Mrs. Forrester.

"No," she said quickly. "*I* haven't one either."

"Of course you have," said Tim. "You always have. Where is it?"

She knew what would happen. He would put it down somewhere on the dark beach and that would be the end of it. "I have no idea where it's gone to," she said.

"Oh, come along," cried Tim. "You know perfectly well where you put it. Stop hiding it."

The crowd stood around waiting. But of course he had no right to her flashlight. It was *hers*. She felt herself stiffening inside, resisting him, and suddenly she was in a panic, for in spite of the hot iron wall against him she had only her helplessness overwhelming her and spreading throughout her body. "No really, Timmy," she protested, trying to muster a casual voice for him and for those invading hordes surrounding her. "Really I've mislaid it. I was hunting for it just this morning. It's simply gone. Somebody must have taken it," she added boldly, as an afterthought.

Tim marched up to her the laugh still on his mouth. "Listen," he said, "nothing's going to happen to your old flashlight. We want it, that's all."

"But, Tim," she laughed too, cornered by his huge bulk above her, "be reasonable." She kept laughing for the sake of the party, looking up pleadingly from her straight stool. He was so close that she could not even rise. She could only laugh because there were all of those people around.

He took hold of her hair. He clutched humorously at her brown cottony hair and they could both feel his fingers fastening in its thick dry nest. The men and women chuckled and tittered, for he was just like a mastiff with a mouse in its paws, playing with the mouse as he shook her head loosely back and forth.

"Come along," he ordered jovially. No one could help roaring at the way the dyed cotton hair and the little pinched face jerked from side to side on the stringy neck.

Only Mrs. Forrester and Tim knew the moment that his playful clutch became deadly. Suddenly, although no one could see the wrenching force in his fingers, he was pulling the hair right up from the skull.

"You're hurting!" cried Mrs. Forrester, astonished. His fingers under the matted bush were really gripped, really pulling and lifting the hair from its roots, so that the roots strained, so that such a sharp pain struck

Mrs. Forrester that she thought he would never stop until her whole scalp flew off, until her head was plucked from her shoulders; and Tim thought so too. He felt that awful gaudy pretentious wad in his hands and he did not want to let it go.

"Where's your flashlight?" he demanded.

She said: "In the desk drawer. Behind me."

It almost seemed that he was sorry she had told him; his fingers loosened slowly. But then he withdrew his hand from the disheveled tangle, stretched his fingers in freedom, and reached around her to the desk drawer behind. Her back had been pressed against it, guarding it like a shield. She leaned forward for him to open the drawer and he found the flashlight at once.

"Well, come on!" Timmy cried. "Everybody ready? All aboard who's going aboard!"

They pushed out of the door into the sweet pervading summer night. Below soft water lapped upon the beach and endless darkness rose up over the cliffs and extended and enveloped them altogether except for the sound of their steps scrambling down the path and their voices shouting, answering, diminishing. Mrs. Forrester stood alone in the doorway, her hands to her head.

"You'll see all right with that," she called after them, vainly trying to make herself heard above the chatter. "It's the best flashlight I ever had. Be careful. Please!"

JANE BOWLES

A Guatemalan Idyll

When the traveler arrived at the pension the wind was blowing hard. Before going in to have the hot soup he had been thinking about, he left his luggage inside the door and walked a few blocks in order to get an idea of the town. He came to a very large arch through which, in the distance, he could see a plain. He thought he could distinguish figures seated around a far-away fire, but he was not certain because the wind made tears in his eyes.

"How dismal," he thought, letting his mouth drop open. "But never mind, brace up. It's probably a group of boys and girls sitting around an open fire having a fine time together. The world is the world, after all is said and done, and a patch of grass in one place is green the way it is in any other."

He turned back and walked along quickly, skirting the walls of the low stone houses. He was a little worried that he might not be able to recognize the door of his pension.

"There's not supposed to be any variety in the U.S.A.," he said to himself, "but this Spanish architecture beats everything, it's so monotonous." He knocked on one of the doors, and shortly a child with a shaved head appeared. With a strong American accent he said to her: "Is this the Pension Espinoza?"

"Sí!" The child led him inside to a fountain in the center of a square patio. He looked into the basin and the child did too.

"There are four fish inside here," she said to him in Spanish. "Would you like me to try and catch one of them for you?"

The traveler did not understand her. He stood there uncomfortably, longing to go to his room. The little girl was still trying to get hold of a fish when her mother, who owned the pension, came out and joined them. The woman was quite fat, but her face was small and pointed and she wore glasses attached by a gold chain to her dress. She shook hands with him and asked him in fairly good English if he had had a pleasant journey.

"He wants to see some of the fish," explained the child.

"Certainly," said Señora Espinoza, moving her hands about in the water with dexterity. "Soon now, soon now," she said, laughing, as one of the fish slipped through her fingers.

The traveler nodded. "I would like to go to my room," he said.

The American was a little dismayed by his room. There were four brass beds in a row, all of them a little crooked and very old.

"God!" he said to himself, "they'll have to remove some of these beds. They give me the willies."

A cord hung down from the ceiling. On the end of it at the height of his nose was a tiny electric bulb. He pulled it on and looked at his hands under the light. They were chapped and dirty. A barefoot servant girl came in with a pitcher and a bowl.

In the dining-room calendars decorated the walls and there was an elaborate cut-glass carafe on every table. Several people had already begun their meal in silence. One little girl was speaking in a high voice.

"I'm not going to the band concert tonight, Mamá," she was saying.

"Why not?" asked her mother, with her mouth full. She looked seriously at her daughter.

"Because I don't like to hear music. I hate it!"

"Why?" asked her mother absently, taking another large mouthful of her food. She spoke in a deep voice like a man. Her head, which was set almost down between her shoulders, was covered with black curls. Her chin was heavy and her skin was dark and coarse; however, she had very beautiful blue eyes. She sat with her legs apart and one arm lying flat on the table. The child bore no resemblance to her mother. She was frail, with stiff hair of the peculiar light color that is often found on mulattoes. Her eyes were so pale that they seemed almost white.

As the traveler came in, the child turned to look at him.

"Now there are nine people eating in this pension," she said immediately.

"Nine," said her mother, "many mouths." She pushed her plate aside wearily and looked up at the calendar beside her on the wall. At last she turned around and saw the stranger. Having already finished her own dinner, she followed the progress of his meal with interest. Once she caught his eye.

"Good appetite," she said, nodding gravely, and then she watched his soup until he had finished it.

"My pills," she said to Lilina, holding her hand out without turning her head. To amuse herself, Lilina emptied the whole bottle into her mother's hand.

"Now you have your pills," she said. When Señora Ramirez realized what had happened, she dealt Lilina a terrible blow on her head and on her face, using the hand which held the pills, and thus leaving them sticking to the child's moist skin and in her hair. The traveler turned around and was so bored and at the same time disgusted by what he saw that he thought he had better look for another pension that very night.

"Soon," said the waitress, putting his meat in front of him, "the musician will come. For fifty cents he will play you all the songs you want to hear. One night would not be time enough. *She* will be out of the room by then." She looked over at Lilina who was squealing like a stuck pig.

"Those pills cost me three quetzales a bottle," Señora Ramirez complained. One of the young men who were at a nearby table came over and examined the empty bottle. He shook his head.

"What a barbarous thing," he said.

"What a dreadful child you are, Lilina!" said an English lady, seated at quite a distance from everybody else. All the diners looked up. Her face and neck were quite red with annoyance. She was speaking to them in English.

"Can't you behave like civilized people ever?" she demanded.

"You be quiet, you," said the young man who had examined the empty pill bottle. His companions burst out laughing.

"O.K. girl," he continued in English. "Want a piece of chewing gum?" His companions were quite helpless with laughter at this last remark and all three of them were obliged to leave the room. Their guffaws could be heard from the patio where they had grouped around the fountain, fairly doubled up.

"It's a disgrace to the adult mind," said the English lady. Lilina's nose had started to bleed and she rushed out of the room.

"And tell Consuelo to hurry in to eat her dinner," her mother called after her. Just then the musician appeared. He was a small man and he wore a black suit and a dirty shirt.

"Well," said Lilina's mother, "at last you came."

"I was having dinner with my uncle. Time passes, Señora Ramirez! Gracias a dios!"

"Gracias a dios nothing! It's unheard-of having to eat dinner without music."

The musician fell into a chair and, bent over low, he started to play with all his strength.

"Waltzes!" shouted Señora Ramirez above the music. "Waltzes!" She looked petulant and at the same time as though she were about to cry. As a matter of fact, the stranger was quite sure that he saw a tear roll down her cheek.

"Are you going to the band concert tonight?" she asked him. She spoke English rather well.

"I don't know. Are you?"

"Yes, with my daughter Consuelo. If the unfortunate girl ever gets here to eat her supper. She doesn't like food. Only dancing. She dances like a real butterfly. She has French blood from me. She is of a much better type than the little one, Lilina, who is always hurting; hurting me, hurting her sister, hurting her friends. I hope that God will have pity on her." At this she really did shed a tear or two, which she brushed away with her napkin.

"Well, she's young yet," said the stranger. Señora Ramirez agreed heartily.

"Yes, she is young," she smiled at him sweetly and seemed quite contented.

Lilina meanwhile was in her room, standing over the white bowl in which they washed their hands, letting the blood drip into it. She was breathing heavily like someone who is trying to simulate anger.

"Stop that breathing! You sound like an old man," said her sister Consuelo, who was lying on the bed with a hot brick on her stomach. Consuelo was small and dark, with a broad flat face and an unusually narrow skull. She had a surly nature, which is often the case when young girls do little else but dream of a lover. Lilina, who was a bully without any curiosity concerning the grown-up world, hated her sister more than anyone else she knew.

"Mamá says that if you don't come in to eat soon she will hit you."

"Is that how *you* got that bloody nose?"

"No," said Lilina. She walked away from the basin and her eye fell on her mother's corset which was lying on the bed. Quickly she picked it up and walked with it into the patio where she threw it into the fountain. Consuelo, frightened at the appropriation of the corset, got up hastily and arranged her hair.

"Too much upset for a girl of my age," she said to herself, patting her stomach. Crossing the patio she saw Señorita Cordoba walking along, holding her head very high and slipping some hairpins more firmly into the bun at the back of her neck. Consuelo felt like a frog or a beetle walking behind her. Together they entered the dining-room.

"Why don't you wait for midnight to strike?" said Señora Ramirez to Consuelo. Señorita Cordoba, assuming that this taunt had been addressed to herself, bridled and stiffened. Her eyes narrowed and she stood still. Señora Ramirez, a gross coward, gave her a strange idiotic smile.

"How is your health, Señorita Cordoba?" she asked softly, and then, feeling confused, she pointed to the stranger and asked him if he knew Señorita Cordoba.

"No, no, he does not know me." She held out her hand stiffly to the stranger and he took it. No names were mentioned.

Consuelo sat down beside her mother and ate voraciously, with a sad look in her eye. Señorita Cordoba ordered only some fruit. She sat looking out into the dark patio, giving the other diners a view of the nape of her neck. Presently she opened a letter and began to read. The others all watched her closely. The three young men who had laughed so heartily before, were smiling now like idiots, waiting for another such occasion to present itself.

The musician was playing a waltz at the request of Señora Ramirez, who was trying her best to attract again the attention of the stranger.

"Tra-la-la-la," she sang, and in order to convey better the beauty of the waltz she folded her arms in front of her and rocked from side to side. "Ay, Consuelo, it is for her to waltz," she said to the stranger. "There will be many people in the plaza tonight, and there is so much wind. I think that you must fetch my shawl, Consuelo, it is getting very cold." While waiting Consuelo's return she shivered and picked her teeth.

The traveler thought she was crazy and a little disgusting. He had come here as a buyer for a very important textile concern. Having completed all his work, he had for some reason decided to stay on for another week, perhaps because he had always heard that a vacation in a foreign country was a desirable thing. He regretted his decision very much already, but there was no boat out before the following Monday. By the end of the meal he was in such despair that his face wore a peculiarly sensitive and young look. In order to buoy himself up a bit, he began to think about what he would get to eat three weeks hence, seated at his mother's table on Thanksgiving Day. They would be very glad to hear that he had not enjoyed himself on this trip because they had always considered it something in the nature of a betrayal when anyone in the family expressed a desire to travel. He thought that they led a lovely life and was inclined to agree with them.

Consuelo had returned with her mother's shawl and she was dreaming again when her mother pinched her arm.

"Well, Consuelo, are you coming to the band concert or are you going to sit here like a dummy? I daresay the Señor is not coming with us, but *we* like music, so get up, and we will say good night to this gentleman and be on our way."

The traveler had not understood this speech and he was therefore very much surprised when Señora Ramirez tapped him on the shoulder and said to him severely in English:

"Good night, Señor. Consuelo and I are going to the band concert. We will see you tomorrow at breakfast."

"Oh, but I am going to the band concert myself," he said, in a panic lest they leave him with a whole evening on his hands.

Señora Ramirez flushed with pleasure. The three walked down the badly lit street together, escorted by a group of skinny yellow dogs.

"These old grilled windows are certainly very beautiful," the traveler said to Señor Ramirez. "Old as the hills themselves, aren't they?"

"You must go to the capital if you want beautiful buildings," said Señora Ramirez. "Very new and clean they are."

"I should think," said the traveler, "these old buildings were your point of interest here, aside from your Indians and their native costumes."

They walked on for a little while in silence. A small boy came up to them and tried to sell them some lollypops.

"Five centavos," said the little boy.

"Absolutely not," said the traveler. He had been warned that the natives would cheat him and he was actually enraged any time they approached him with their wares.

"Four centavos—three centavos—"

"No-no-no-! Go away!" The little boy ran ahead of them.

"I would like a lollypop," said Consuelo to him.

"Well, why didn't you say so, then?" he demanded.

"No," said Consuelo.

"She does not mean no," explained her mother. "She can't learn to speak English. She has clouds in her head."

"I see," said the traveler. Consuelo looked mortified. When they came to the end of the street, Señora Ramirez stood still and lowered her head like a bull.

"Listen," she said to Consuelo. "Listen, you can hear the music from here."

"Yes, Mamá. Indeed you can." They stood listening to the faint marimba noise that reached them. The traveler sighed.

"Please, let's get going if we *are* going," he said. "Otherwise there is no point."

The square was already crowded when they arrived. The older people sat on benches under the trees, while the younger ones walked round and round, the girls in one direction and the boys in the other. The musicians played inside a kiosk in the center of the square. Señora Ramirez led both Consuelo and the stranger into the girls' line, and they had not been walking more than a minute before she settled into a comfortable gait, very much like someone relaxing in an armchair.

"We have three hours," she said to Consuelo.

The stranger looked around him. Many of the girls were barefoot and pure Indian. They walked holding tightly to each other and were frequently convulsed with laughter.

The musicians were playing a formless but militant-sounding piece which came to many climaxes without ending. The drummer was the man who had just played the violin at Señora Espinoza's pension.

"Look," said the traveler excitedly. "Isn't that the man who was just playing for us at dinner? He must have run all the way. I'll bet he's sweating some."

"Yes, it is he," said Señora Ramirez. "The nasty little rat. I would like to tear him right off his stand. Remember the one at the Gran Hotel, Consuelo? He stopped at every table, Señor, and I have never seen such beautiful teeth in my life. A smile on his face from the moment he came into the room until he went out again. This one looks at his shoes while he is playing and he would like to kill us all."

Some big boys threw confetti in the traveler's face.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "I wonder what kind of fun they get out of just walking around and around this little park and throwing confetti at each other."

The boys' line was in a constant uproar about something. The brighter the smiles on the boys' faces became, the more he suspected them of plotting something, probably against himself, for he was apparently the only tourist there that evening. Finally he was so upset by them that he walked along looking up at the stars, or even for short stretches with his eyes shut, because it seemed to him that somehow this rendered him a little less visible. Suddenly he caught sight of Señorita Cordoba. She was across the street buying lollypops from a boy.

"Señorita!" He waved his hand from where he was and then joyfully bounded out of the line and across the street. He stood panting by her side, while she reddened considerably and did not quite know what to say to him.

Señora Ramirez and Consuelo came to a standstill and stood like two monuments, staring after him, while the lines brushed past them on either side.

Lilina was looking out of her window at some boys who were playing on the corner of the street, under the street light. One of them repeatedly pulled from his pocket a snake which he would then stuff in again. Lilina wanted it very much. She chose her toys or her animals according to whether or not she thought they would endow her with power and responsibility in the eyes of others. She thought now that if she were able to get the snake she would perhaps put on a little act called 'Lilina and the Viper' and charge admission. She imagined that she would wear a fancy dress and let the snake wriggle under her collar. She left her room and went out of doors. The wind was stronger than it had been and she could hear the music playing even from where she was. She felt chilly and hurried toward the boys.

"For how much will you sell your snake?" she asked the oldest boy, Ramon.

"You mean Victoria?" said Ramon. His voice was beginning to change and there was a shadow above his upper lip.

"Victoria is too much of a queen for you to have," said one of the smaller boys. "She is a beauty and you are not." They all roared with laughter, including Ramon who looked very silly all at once. He giggled like a girl. Lilina's heart sank. She was determined to have the snake.

"Are you ever going to stop laughing and begin to bargain with me? If you don't I'll have to go back to the house, because my mother and sister will be coming home soon, and they wouldn't allow me to be talking here like this with you. I'm from a good family."

This sobered Ramon up, and he ordered the boys to be quiet. He took Victoria from his pocket and played with her in silence. Lilina stared at Victoria.

"Come to my house," said Ramon. "My mother will want to know how much I'm selling her for."

"All right," said Lilina, "but be quick and I don't want them with us." She indicated the other boys. Ramon gave them orders to go back to their houses and to meet him later at the playground near the Cathedral.

"Where do you live?" she asked him.

"Calle de las Delicias number six."

"Does your house belong to you?"

"My house belongs to my aunt Gudelia."

"Is she richer than your mother?"

"Oh, yes." They said no more to each other.

There were eight rooms opening onto the patio of Ramon's house, but only one was furnished. In this room the family cooked and slept. His mother and his aunt were seated opposite each other on two brightly painted chairs. Both were fat and both were wearing black. The only light came from a charcoal fire which was burning in a brazier on the floor.

They had bought the chairs that very morning and were consequently feeling lighthearted and festive. When the children arrived they were singing a little song together.

"Why don't we buy something to drink?" said Gudelia, when they stopped singing.

"Now you're going to go crazy, I see," said Ramon's mother. "You're very disagreeable when you're drinking."

"No, I'm not," said Gudelia.

"Mother," said Ramon, "this little girl has come to buy Victoria."

"I have never seen you before," said Ramon's mother to Lilina.

"Nor I," said Gudelia. "I am Ramon's aunt, Gudelia. This is my house."

"My name is Lilina Ramirez. I want to bargain for Ramon's Victoria.

"Victoria," they repeated gravely.

"Ramon is very fond of Victoria and so are Gudelia and I," said his mother. "It's a shame that we sold Alfredo, the parrot. We sold him for far too little. He sang and danced. We have taken care of Victoria for a long time, and it has been very expensive. She eats much meat." This was an obvious lie. They all looked at Lilina.

"Where do you live, dear?" Gudelia asked Lilina.

"I live in the capital, but I'm staying now at Señora Espinoza's pension."

"I meet her in the market every day of my life," said Gudelia. "Maria de la Luz Espinoza. She buys a lot. How many people has she staying in her house, five, six?"

"Nine."

"Nine! Dear God! Does she have many animals?"

"Certainly," said Lilina.

"Come," said Ramon to Lilina, "let's go outside and bargain."

"He loves that snake," said Ramon's mother, looking fixedly at Lilina.

The aunt sighed. "Victoria—Victoria."

Lilina and Ramon climbed through a hole in the wall and sat down together in the midst of some foliage.

"Listen," said Ramon. "If you kiss me, I'll give you Victoria for nothing. You have blue eyes. I saw them when we were in the street."

"I can hear what you are saying," his mother called out from the kitchen.

"Shame, shame," said Gudelia, "giving Victoria away for nothing. Your mother will be without food. I can buy my own food, but what will your mother do?"

Lilina jumped to her feet impatiently. She saw that they were getting nowhere, and unlike most of her countrymen, she was always eager to get things done quickly.

She stamped back into the kitchen, opened her eyes very wide, in order to frighten the two ladies, and roared as loudly as she was capable of doing: "Sell me that snake right now or I will go away and never put my foot in this house again."

The two women were not used to such a display of rage concerning the mere settlement of a price. They rose from their chairs and started moving about the room to no purpose, picking up things and putting them down again. They were not quite sure what to do. Gudelia was terribly upset and she stepped here and there with her hand under her breast, peering about cautiously. Finally she slipped out into the patio and disappeared.

Ramon took Victoria out of his pocket. They arranged a price and Lilina left, carrying her in a little box.

Meanwhile Señora Ramirez and her daughter were on their way home from the band concert. Both of them were in a bad humor. Consuelo was not disposed to talk at all. She looked angrily at the houses they were passing and sighed at everything her mother had to say.

"You have no merriment in your heart," said Señora Ramirez, "just revenge." As Consuelo refused to answer, she continued, "Sometimes I feel that I am walking along with an assassin."

She stopped still in the street and looked up at the sky. "Jesus Maria!" she said, "don't let me say such things about my own daughter, Consuelo." She clutched at Consuelo's arm.

"Come, come, let us hurry, my feet ache. What an ugly city this is!"

Consuelo began to whimper. The word assassin had affected her painfully. Although she had no very clear idea of an assassin in her mind, she knew it to be a gross insult and contrary to all traditions of what a young lady of breeding should be called. It so frightened her that her mother had used such a word concerning her, that she actually felt a little sick at her stomach.

"No, Mamá—no," she cried, "don't say that I am an assassin, don't!" Her hands were beginning to shake and already the tears were filling her eyes. Her mother hugged her and they stood for a moment locked in each other's arms.

Maria, the servant, was standing near the fountain looking into it when Consuelo and her mother arrived at the pension. The traveler and Señorita Cordoba were seated together having a chat.

"Doesn't love interest you?" the traveler was asking her.

"No—no," answered Señorita Cordoba. "City life—business—the theater." She sounded somewhat half-hearted about the theater.

"Well, that's funny," said the traveler. "In my country most young girls are interested in love. There are some, of course, who are interested in having a career, either business or the stage. But I've heard tell that even these women deep down in their hearts want a home and everything that goes with it."

"So?" said Señorita Cordoba.

"Well, yes," said the traveler, "deep down in your heart don't you always hope the right man will come along some day?"

"No—no—no. Do you?" she answered absent-mindedly.

"Who, me? No."

"No?"

She was the most preoccupied woman he had ever spoken to.

"Look, Señoras," said Maria to Consuelo and her mother. "Look what is floating around in the fountain! What is it?"

Consuelo bent over the fountain and fished around a bit. Presently she pulled out her mother's pink corset.

"Why, Mamá," she said. "It's your corset." Señora Ramirez examined the wet corset. It was covered with muck from the bottom of the fountain. She went over to a chair and sat down on it, burying her face in her hands. She rocked back and forth and sobbed very softly. Señora Espinoza came out of her room.

"Lilina, my sister, threw it into the fountain," Consuelo announced to all present.

Señora Espinoza looked at the corset.

"It can be fixed, it can be fixed," she said, walking over to Señora Ramirez and putting her arms around her.

"Look, my friend, my dear little friend, why don't you go to bed and get some sleep? Tomorrow you can think about getting it cleaned."

"How can we stand it—oh, how can we stand it?" Señora Ramirez asked imploringly. Her beautiful eyes were filled with sorrow and innocence.

"Sometimes," she said, in a trembling voice, "I have no more strength than a sparrow. I would like to send my children to the four winds and sleep and sleep and sleep."

Consuelo, hearing this, said in a gentle tone: "Why don't you do so, Mamá?"

"They are like two daggers in my heart, you see?" continued her mother.

"No, they are not," said Señora Espinoza, "they are flowers that brighten your life." She removed her glasses and polished them on her blouse.

"Daggers in my heart," repeated Señora Ramirez.

"Have some hot soup," urged Señora Espinoza. "Maria will make you some—a gift from me—and then you can go to bed and forget all about this."

"No, I think I will just sit here, thank you."

"Mamá is going to have one of her fits," said Consuelo to the servant. "She does sometimes. She gets just like a child instead of getting angry, and she doesn't worry about what she is eating or when she goes to sleep, but she just sits in a chair or goes walking and her face looks very different from the way it looks at other times." The servant nodded and Consuelo went in to bed.

"I have French blood," Señora Ramirez was saying to Señora Espinoza. "I am very delicate for that reason—too delicate for my husband." Señora Espinoza seemed worried by the confession of her friend. She had no interest in gossip or what people had to say about their lives. Señora Ramirez often had dreams about her in which she appeared as a man.

The traveler was highly amused.

"I'll be damned!" he said, "all this because of an old corset. Some people have nothing to think about in this world. It's funny, though, as funny as a barrel of monkeys."

Señorita Cordoba had not noticed that anything particularly funny had happened.

"It's too bad," she said, "very much too bad that the corset was spoiled. What are you doing here in this country?"

"I'm buying textiles—at least I was, and now I'm just taking a little vacation here until the next boat leaves for the United States. I kind of miss my family and I'm anxious to get back. I don't see what you're supposed to get out of traveling."

"Oh, yes, yes, surely you do," said Señorita Cordoba politely. "Now if you will excuse me I am going inside to do a little drawing. I must not forget how in this peasant land."

"What are you, an artist?" he asked.

"I draw dresses." She disappeared.

"Oh, God!" thought the traveler after she had left. "Here I am, left alone, and I'm not sleepy yet. This empty patio is so barren and so uninteresting, and as far as Señorita Cordoba is concerned, she's an iceberg. I like her neck though. She has a neck like a swan, so long and white and slender, the kind of neck you dream about girls having—but she's more like a virgin than a swan." He turned around and noticed that Señora Ramirez was still sitting in her chair. He picked up his own chair and carried it over next to hers.

"Do you mind?" he asked. "I see that you've decided to take a little night air. It isn't a bad idea. I don't feel like going to bed much either."

"No," she said, "I don't want to go to bed. I will sit here. I like to sit out at night, if I am warmly enough dressed, and look up at the stars."

"Yes, it's a great source of peace," the traveler said. "People don't do enough of it these days."

"Would you not like very much to go to Italy?" Señora Ramirez asked him. "The fruit trees and the flowers will be wonderful there at night."

"Well, you've got enough fruit and flowers here I should say. What do you want to go to Italy for? I'll bet there isn't as much variety in the fruit there as there is here."

"No? Do you have many flowers in your country?"

The traveler wasn't able to decide.

"I would like really," continued Señora Ramirez, "to be somewhere else—in your country or in Italy. I would like to be somewhere where the life is beautiful. I care very much whether life is beautiful or ugly. People who live here don't care very much. Because they do not think." She touched her finger to her forehead. "I love beautiful things; beautiful houses, beautiful gardens, beautiful songs. When I was a young girl I was truly wild with happiness; doing and thinking and running in and out. I was so happy my mother was afraid that I would fall and break my leg or have some kind of accident. She was a very religious woman, but when I was a young girl I could not remember to think about such a thing. I was up always every morning before anybody except the Indians, and every morning I would go to market with them to buy food for all the houses. For many years I was doing this. Even when I was very little. It was very easy for me to do anything. I loved to learn English. I had a professor and I used to get on my knees in front of my father that the professor should stay longer with me every day. I was walking in the parks when my sisters were sleeping. My eyes were so big." She made a circle with two fingers. "And shiny like two diamonds—I was so excited all the time." She churned the air with her clenched fist. "Like this," she said, "like a storm. My sisters called me wild Sophia. At the same time they were calling me wild Sophia, I was in love with my uncle Aldo Torres. He never came much to the house before, but I heard my mother say that he had no more money and we would feed him. We were very rich and getting richer every year. I felt very sorry for him and was thinking about him all the time. We fell in love with each other and were kissing and hugging each other when nobody was there who could see us. I would have lived with him in a grass hut. He married a woman who had a little money, who also loved him very much. When he was married he got fat and started joking a lot with my father. I was glad for him that he was richer but pretty sad for myself. Then my sister Juanita, the oldest, married a very rich man. We were all very happy about her and there was a very big wedding."

"You must have been broken-hearted though about your uncle Aldo Torres going off with someone else, when you had befriended him so much when he was poor."

"Oh, I liked him very much," she said. Her memory seemed suddenly to have failed her and she did not appear to be interested in speaking any longer of the past. The traveler felt disturbed.

"I would love to travel," she continued, "very, very much, and I think it would be very nice to have the life of an actress, without children. You know it is my nature to love men and kissing."

"Well," said the traveler, "nobody gets as much kissing as they would like to get. Most people are frustrated. You'd be surprised at the number of people in my country who are frustrated and good-looking at the same time."

She turned her face toward his. The one little light bulb shed just enough light to enable him to see into her beautiful eyes. The tears were still wet on her lashes and they magnified her eyes to such an extent that they appeared to be almost twice their normal size. While she was looking at him she caught her breath.

"Oh, my darling man," she said to him suddenly. "I don't want to be separated from you. Let's go where I can hold you in my arms." The traveler was feeling excited. She had taken hold of his hand and was crushing it very hard.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked her stupidly.

"Into your bed." She closed her eyes and waited for him to answer.

"All right. Are you sure?"

She nodded her head vigorously.

"This," he said to himself, "is undoubtedly one of those things that you don't want to remember the next morning. I'll want to shake it off like a dog shaking water off its back. But what can I do? It's too far along now. I'll be going home soon and the whole thing will be just a soap bubble among many other soap bubbles."

He was beginning to feel inspired and he could not understand it, because he had not been drinking.

"A soap bubble among many other soap bubbles," he repeated to himself. His inner life was undefined but well controlled as a rule. Together they went into his room.

"Ah," said Señora Ramirez, after he had closed the door behind them, "this makes me happy."

She fell on the bed sideways, like a beaten person. Her feet stuck out in the air, and her heavy breathing filled the room. He realized that he had never before seen a person behave in this manner unless sodden with alcohol, and he did not know what to do. According to all his standards and the standards of his friends she was not a pleasant thing to lie beside. She was unfastening her dress at the neck. The brooch with which she pinned her collar together she stuck into the pillow behind her.

"So much fat," she said, "so much fat." She was smiling at him very tenderly. This for some reason excited him and he took off his own clothing and got into bed beside her. He was as cold as a clam and very bony, but being a truly passionate woman she did not notice any of this.

"Do you really want to go through with this?" he said to her, for he was incapable of finding new words for a situation that was certainly unlike any other he had ever experienced. She fell upon him and felt his face and his neck with feverish excitement.

"Dear God!" she said, "Dear God!", when they were in the very act of making love, "I have lived twenty years for this moment and I cannot think that heaven itself could be more wonderful."

The traveler hardly listened to this remark. His face was hidden in the pillow and he was feeling the pangs of guilt in the very midst of his pleasure. When it was all over she said to him: "That is all I want to do ever." She patted his hands and smiled at him.

"Are you happy, too?" she asked him.

"Yes, indeed," he said. He got off the bed and went out into the patio.

"She was certainly in a bad way," he thought. "It was almost like death itself." He didn't want to think any further. He stayed outside near the fountain as long as possible. When he returned she was up in front of the bureau trying to rearrange her hair.

"I'm ashamed of the way I look," she said. "I don't look the way I feel." She laughed and he told her that she looked perfectly all right. She drew the traveler down on the bed again. "Don't send me back to my room," she said, "I love to be here with you, my sweetheart."

The dawn was breaking when the traveler awakened the next morning. Señora Ramirez was still beside him, sleeping very soundly. Her arm was flung over the pillow behind her head.

"Lordy," said the traveler to himself. "I had better get this out of here." He shook her as hard as he could.

"Mrs. Ramirez," he said, "Mrs. Ramirez, wake up—wake up!" When she finally did wake up, she looked frightened to death. She turned and stared at him blankly for a little while. Before he noticed any change in her expression her hand was already moving over his body.

"Mrs. Ramirez," he said, "I'm worried that perhaps your daughters will get up and raise a hullabaloo. You know, start whining for you, or something like that. Your place is probably in there."

"What?" she asked him. He had pulled away from her to the other side of the bed.

"I say that I think you ought to go into your room now the morning's here."

"Yes, my darling, I will go to my room. You are right." She sidled over to him and put her arms around him.

"I will see you later in the dining-room, and look at you and look at you, because I love you so much."

"Don't be crazy," he said. "You don't want anything to show in your face—you don't want people to guess about this. We must be cold with one another."

She put her hand over her heart.

"Ay!" she said, "this cannot be."

"Oh, Mrs. Ramirez, please be sensible. Look, you go to your room and we'll talk about this in the morning—or at least, later in the morning."

"Cold I cannot be." To illustrate this, she looked deep into his eyes.

"I know—I know," he said. "You're a very passionate woman, but my God! here we are in a crazy Spanish country."

He jumped from the bed and she followed him. After she had put on her shoes, he took her to the door.

"Goodbye," he said.

She couched her cheek on her two hands and looked up at him. He shut the door.

She was too happy to go right to bed, and so she went over to the bureau and took from it a little stale sugar virgin which she broke into three pieces. She went over to Consuelo and shook her very hard. Consuelo opened her eyes and after some time asked her mother crossly what she wanted. Señora Ramirez stuffed the candy into her daughter's mouth.

"Eat it, darling," she said. "It's the little Virgin from the bureau."

"Ay, Mamá!" Consuelo sighed. "Who knows what you will do next? It is already light out and you are still in your clothes. I am sure there is no other mother who is still in her clothes now, in the whole world. Please don't make me eat any more of the Virgin, now. Tomorrow I will eat some more. But it is tomorrow, isn't it? What a mix-up, I don't like it." She shut her eyes and tried to sleep. There was a look of deep disgust on her face. Her mother's "spell" was a little frightening this time. Señora Ramirez now went over to Lilina's bed and awakened her. Lilina opened her eyes wide and immediately she looked very tense because she thought she was going to be scolded about the corset and also about having gone out alone after dark.

"Here, little one," said her mother, "eat some of the Virgin."

Lilina was delighted. She ate the stale sugar candy and patted her stomach to show how pleased she was. The snake was asleep in a box near her bed.

"Now tell me," said her mother. "What did you do today?" She had completely forgotten about the corset. Lilina was beside herself with joy. She ran her fingers along her mother's lips and then put them in her mother's mouth. Señora Ramirez snapped at the fingers like a dog. Then she laughed uproariously.

"Mamá, please be quiet," pleaded Consuelo, "I want to go to sleep."

"Yes, darling. Everything will be quiet so that you can sleep peacefully."

"I bought a snake, Mamá," said Lilina.

"Good!" exclaimed Señora Ramirez. And after musing a little while with her daughter's hand in hers, she went to bed.

In her room Señora Ramirez was dressing and talking to her children.

"I want you to put on your fiesta dresses," she said, "because I am going to ask the traveler to have lunch with us."

"I daresay," said Consuelo, who was in love with the traveler by now and very jealous of Señorita Cordoba (who she had decided was the traveler's sweetheart), "I daresay he has already asked Señorita Cordoba to lunch. They have been talking together near the fountain almost since dawn."

"Santa Catarina!" cried her mother angrily, "you have the eyes of a madman who sees flowers where there are only cow turds." She covered her face heavily with a powder that was distinctly violet in tint, and pulled a green chiffon scarf around her shoulders which she pinned together with a brooch in the form of a golf stick. Then she and the girls, who were dressed in pink satin, went out into the patio and sat together just a little out of the sun. The parrot was swinging back and forth on his perch and singing. Señora Ramirez sang along with him; her own voice was a little lower than the parrot's.

"Pastores, pastores, vamos a Belen
A ver a Maria y al niño tambien."

She conducted the parrot with her hand. The old Señora, mother of Señora Espinoza, was walking round and round the patio. She stopped for a moment and played with Señora Ramirez's sea shell bracelet.

"Do you want some candy?" she asked Señora Ramirez.

"I can't. My stomach is very bad."

"Do you want some candy?" she repeated. Señora Ramirez smiled and looked up at the sky. The old lady patted her cheek.

"Beautiful," she said, "you are beautiful."

"Mamá!" screamed Señora Espinoza, running out of her room, "come to bed!"

The old lady clung to the rungs of Señora Ramirez's chair like a tough bird and her daughter was obliged to pry her hands open before she was able to get her away.

"I'm sorry, Señora Ramirez," she said, "but when you get old, you know how it is."

"Pretty bad," said Señora Ramirez. She was looking at the traveler and Señorita Cordoba. They had their backs turned to her.

"Lilina," she said, "go and ask him to have lunch with us—go. No, I will write it down. Get me a pen and paper."

"Dear," she wrote, when Lilina returned, "will you come to have lunch at my table this afternoon? The girls will be with me, too. All the three of us send you our deep affection. I tell Consuelo to tell the maid to move the plates all to the same table.

"Very truly yours,
"Sophia Piega de Ramirez."

The traveler read the note, acquiesced and shortly they were all seated together at the dining-room table.

"Now this is really stranger than fiction," he said to himself. "Here I am sitting with these people at their table and feeling as though I had been here all my life and the truth of the matter is that I have only been in this pension about fourteen or fifteen hours altogether, not even one day. Yesterday I felt that I was on a Zulu island, I was so depressed. The human animal is the funniest animal of them all."

Señora Ramirez had arranged to sit close beside the stranger, and she pressed her thigh to his all during the time that she was eating her soup. The traveler's appetite was not very good. He was excited and felt like talking.

After lunch, Señora Ramirez decided to go for a walk instead of taking a siesta with her daughters. She put on her gloves and took with her an umbrella to shield her from the sun. After she had walked a little while she came to a long road, completely desolate save for a few ruins and some beautiful tall trees along the way. She looked about her and shook her head at the thought of the terrible earthquake that had thrown to the ground this city, reputed to have been once the most beautiful city in all the Western Hemisphere. She could see ahead of her, way at the road's end, the volcano named "Fire." She crossed herself and bit her lips. She had come walking with the intention of dreaming of her lover, but the thought of this volcano which had erupted many centuries ago, chased all dreams of love from her mind. She saw in her mind the walls of the houses caving in, and the roofs falling on the heads of the babies—and the mothers, their skirts covered with mud, running through the streets in despair.

"The innocents," she said to herself. "I am sure that God had a perfect reason for this, but what could it have been? Santa Maria, but what could it have been! If such a disorder should happen again on this earth, I would turn completely to jelly like a helpless idiot."

She looked again at the volcano ahead of her, and although nothing had changed, to her it seemed that a cloud had passed across the face of the sun.

"You are crazy," she went on, "to think that an earthquake will again shake this city to the earth. You will not be going through such a trial as these other mothers went through because everything now is different. God doesn't send such big trials any more, like floods over the whole world, and plagues."

She thanked her stars that she was living now and not before. It made her feel quite weak to think of the women who had been forced to live before she was born. The future too, she had heard, was to be very stormy, because of wars.

"Ay," she said to herself, "precipices on all sides of me!" It had not been such a good idea to take a walk after all. She thought again of the traveler, shutting her eyes for a moment.

"Mi amante! Amante querido," she whispered; and she remembered the little books with their covers lettered in gold, books about love, which she had read when she was a young girl, and without the burden of a family. These little books had made the ability to read seem like the most worthwhile and delightful talent to her. They had never, of course, touched on the coarser aspects of love, but in later years, she did not find it strange that it was for such physical ends that the heroes and the heroines had been pining. Never had she found any difficulty in associating nosegays and couplets with the more gross manifestations of love.

She turned off onto another road in order to avoid facing the volcano, constantly ahead of her. She thought of the traveler without really thinking of him at all. Her eyes glowed with the pleasure of being in love and she decided that she had been very stupid to think of an earthquake on the very day that God was making a bed of roses for her.

"Thank you, thank you," she whispered to Him, "from the bottom of my heart. Ah!" She smoothed her dress over her bosom. She was suddenly pleased with everything. Ahead she noticed that there was a very long convent, somewhat ruined, in front of which some boys were playing. There was also a little pavilion standing not far away. It was difficult to understand why it was so situated, where there was no formal park, nor any trees, nor grass, but just some dirt and a few bushes. It had the strange static look of a ship that has been grounded. It was a small kiosk anyway and badly in need of a good coat of paint. Señora Ramirez looked at it distastefully, but feeling tired, she was soon climbing up the flimsy steps, red in the face with fear lest she fall through to the ground. Inside the kiosk, she spread a newspaper over the bench and sat down. Soon all dreams of her lover faded from her mind and she felt hot and fretful. She moved her feet around on the floor impatiently at the thought of having to walk all the way home. The dust rose up into the air and she was obliged to cover her mouth with her handkerchief.

"I wish to Heaven," she said to herself, "that he would come and carry me out of this kiosk." She sat idly watching the boys playing in the dirt in front of the convent. One of them was a good deal taller than the others. As she watched their games, her head slumped forward and she fell asleep.

No tourists came, so the little boys decided to go over to the main square and meet the buses, with their lollypops and their picture postcards. The oldest boy announced that he would stay behind.

"You're crazy," they said to him, "completely crazy."

He looked at them haughtily and did not answer. They ran down the road, screaming that they were going to earn a thousand quetzales.

He remained behind because for some time he had noticed that there was someone in the kiosk. He knew even from where he stood that it was a woman because he could see that her dress was brightly colored like a flower garden. She had been sitting there for a long time and he wondered if she were not dead.

"If she is dead," he thought, "I will carry her body all the way into town." The idea excited him and he approached the pavilion with bated breath. He went inside and stood over Señora Ramirez, but when he saw that she was quite old and fat and obviously the mother of a good rich family he was frightened and all his imagination failed him. He thought he would go away but then he decided differently and he shook her foot. There was no change. Her mouth, which had been open, remained so and she went on sleeping, so the boy took a good piece of the flesh on her upper arm between his thumb and forefinger and twisted it very hard. She awakened with a shudder and looked up at the boy perplexed.

His eyes were soft.

"I awakened you," he said, "because I have to go home to my house and you are not safe here. Before, there was a man here in the bandstand trying to look under your skirt. When you are asleep, you know, people they just go wild. There were some drunks here too, singing an obscene song, standing on the ground, right under you. You would have had red ears if you had heard it, I can tell you that." He shrugged his shoulders and spat on the floor. He looked completely disgusted.

"What is the matter?" Señora Ramirez asked him.

"Bah, this city makes me sick. I want to be a carpenter in the capital, but I can't. My mother gets lonesome. All my brothers and sisters are dead."

"Ay," said Señora Ramirez, "how sad for you! I have a beautiful house in the capital. Maybe my husband would let you be a carpenter there, if you did not have to stay with your mother."

The boy's eyes were shining.

"I'm coming back with you," he said. "My uncle is with my mother."

"Yes," said Señora Ramirez, "maybe it will happen."

"My sweetheart is there in the city," he continued, "she was living here before."

Señora Ramirez took the boy's long hand in her own. The word sweetheart had recalled many things to her.

"Sit down, sit down," she said to him, "sit down here beside me. I too have a sweetheart. He's in his room now."

"Where does he work?"

"In the United States."

"What luck for you! My sweetheart wouldn't love him better than she loves me, though. She wants me or simply death. She says so any time I ask her. She would tell the same thing to you if you asked her about me. It's the truth."

Señora Ramirez pulled him down on the bench next to her. He was confused and looked out over his shoulder at the road. She tickled the back of his hand and smiled up at him in a coquettish manner. The boy looked at her and his face seemed to weaken.

"You have blue eyes," he said.

Señora Ramirez could not wait another minute. She took his head in her two hands and kissed him several times full on the mouth.

"Oh, God!" she said. The boy was delighted with her fine clothes, her blue eyes and her womanly ways. He took Señora Ramirez in his arms with real tenderness.

"I love you," he said. Tears filled his eyes and because he was so full of a feeling of gratitude and kindness, he added, "I love my sweetheart and I love you too."

He helped her down the steps of the kiosk and with his arm around her waist he led her to a sequestered spot belonging to the convent grounds.

The traveler was lying on his bed, consumed by a feeling of guilt. He had again spent the night with Señora Ramirez and he was wondering whether or not his mother would read this in his eyes when he returned. He had never done anything like this before. His behavior until now had never been without precedent, and he felt like a two-headed monster and as though he had somehow slipped from the real world into the other world, the world that he had always imagined as a little boy to be inhabited by assassins and orphans, and children whose mothers went to work. He put his head in his hands and wondered if he could ever forget Señora Ramirez. He remembered having read that the careers of many men had been ruined by women they could not get away from because of a certain physical stranglehold. These women, he knew, were always bad and they were never Americans, nor, he was certain, did they resemble Señora Ramirez. It was terrible to have done something he was certain that none of his friends had ever done before him, nor would do after him. This experience, he knew, would have to remain a secret, and nothing made him more ill than a secret. He liked to imagine that he and the group of men he considered to be his friends, discoursed freely on all things that were in their hearts and in their souls. He was beginning to talk to women in this free way too—he talked to them a good deal and he urged his friends to do likewise. He realized that Señora Ramirez and he never spoke, and this horrified him so that he shuddered and said to himself:

"We are like two gorillas." He had been, it was true, with one or two prostitutes, but he had never taken them to his own bed, nor had he stayed with them longer than an hour. Also, they had been curly-headed blonde American girls and recommended to him by his friends.

"Well," he told himself, "there is no use making myself into a nervous wreck. What is done is done and anyway, I think I might be excused on the grounds that, one, I am in a foreign country which has sort of put me off my balance; two, that I have been eating strange foods that I am not used to, and living at an unusually high altitude for me; and—three—that I haven't had my own kind to talk to for three solid weeks."

He felt quite a good deal happier after having enumerated these extenuating conditions, and he added: "When I get on my boat I shall wave goodbye to the dock, and say good riddance to bad rubbish, and if the boss ever tries to send me out of the country, I'll tell him: 'Not for a million dollars!'." He wished that it were possible to change pensions but he had already paid for the remainder of the week and was very thrifty, as, indeed, it was necessary for him to be. He now lay down on his bed quite satisfied with himself but soon he began to feel guilty again, and like an old truck horse, laboriously he went once more through the entire process of reassuring himself.

Lilina had put Victoria in a box and was walking in the town.

Not far from the central square there was a material shop owned by a Jewish woman. Lilina had been there several times with her mother to buy wool. She knew the son of the proprietress, with whom she often stopped to talk. He was very quiet, but Lilina liked him. She decided to drop in now at the shop with Victoria.

When she arrived the boy's mother was behind the counter stamping some old bolts of material with purple ink.

When she saw Lilina she smiled brightly.

"Enrique is in the patio. How nice of you to come and see him. Why don't you come more often?" She was very anxious to please Lilina because she knew the extent of Señora Ramirez' wealth and was proud to have her as a customer.

Lilina went over to the little door that led into the patio behind the shop and opened it. Enrique was crouching in the dirt beside the wash tubs. She was surprised to see that his head was wrapped in bandages. From a distance the dirty bandages gave the effect of a white turban.

She walked a little nearer to him and saw that he was arranging some marbles in a row.

"Good morning, Enrique," Lilina said to him.

Enrique recognized her voice and without turning his head, he started slowly picking up the marbles one at a time and putting them in his pocket.

His mother had followed Lilina into the patio and when she saw that Enrique, instead of rising to his feet and greeting Lilina, remained absorbed by his marbles, she walked over to him and gave his arm a sharp twist.

"Leave those damned marbles alone and speak to Lilina," his mother said to him. Enrique got up and went over to Lilina while his mother, bending over with difficulty, finished picking up the marbles that he had left behind on the ground.

Lilina noticed that there was a big, dark red stain on Enrique's bandage.

They both walked back into the store. Enrique did not enjoy being with Lilina. In fact, he was a little afraid of her and whenever she came to the shop he could hardly wait for her to leave.

He went over now to a bolt of printed material which he started to unwind. When he had unwound a few yards he followed the convolutions of the pattern with his index finger.

Lilina, not realizing that his gesture was a carefully disguised insult to herself, watched Enrique with a certain amount of interest.

"I have something with me inside of this box," she said after a while.

Enrique, hearing his mother's footsteps approaching, turned and smiled at her sadly.

"Please show it to me," he said.

She lifted the lid from the snake's box and took it over to Enrique.

"This is Victoria," she said.

Enrique thought she was beautiful. He lifted her from her box and held her just below the head very firmly, then he raised his arm until the snake's eyes were on a level with his own.

"Good morning, Victoria," he said to her, "do you like it here in the store?"

This remark annoyed his mother who had slipped down to the other end of the counter because she was in mortal terror of the snake.

"You speak as though you were drunk," she said to Enrique. "That snake can't understand a word you are saying."

"She's really beautiful," said Enrique.

"Let's put her back in the box and take her to the square," said Lilina, but Enrique did not hear her, he was so enchanted with the sensation of holding Victoria.

His mother again spoke up. "Do you hear Lilina talking to you?" she shouted at him, "or is that bandage covering your ears as well as your head?"

She had meant this remark to be stinging and witty as well, but she realized herself that there had been no point to it.

"Well, go with the little girl," she added.

Lilina and Enrique set off toward the square together. Lilina had once more put Victoria back into her box.

"Why are we going to the square?" Enrique asked Lilina.

"Because we are going there with Victoria."

Six or seven buses had converged in one of the streets that skirted the square. They had come from the capital and other smaller cities in the region.

The passengers who were not going any farther had already gotten out and were standing in a bunch talking together and buying food from the venders. One lady had brought with her a cardboard fan intended as an advertisement for beer with which she fanned not only herself but anyone who happened to be standing near her.

The chauffeurs were all racing their motors and some were trying to move into positions more advantageous for departing.

Lilina was excited by the noise and by the crowd. Enrique, on the other hand, had sought a quiet spot and was now standing underneath a tree.

Lilina ran over to him after a while and told him that she was going to let Victoria out of her box.

"Then we'll see what happens," she said.

"No, no," insisted Enrique, "she'll only crawl under the buses and be squashed to death. Snakes live in the woods or in the rocks."

Lilina paid little attention to Enrique and she was soon crouching on the edge of the curbstone busily unfastening the string around Victoria's box.

Enrique felt a little ill and his head began to pain him. He wondered if he could leave the square without Lilina's seeing him, but he decided that he did not have the courage to do so. Although the wind had risen, the sun was very hot and the tree afforded him little shade. He watched Lilina for a little while but soon he looked away from her and began to think instead about his own death. He was certain that his head pained him today more than usual. This caused him to sink into the blackest gloom, as he did whenever he remembered the day that he had fallen and pierced his skull on a rusty nail. His life had always been precious to him as far back as he could recall and it seemed perhaps even more so now that he realized it could be violently interrupted. He disliked Lilina; perhaps it was because he suspected instinctively that she was a person who could fall over and over again into the same pile of broken glass and scream just as loudly the first time as the last.

Victoria by now had wriggled under the buses and was shortly crushed flat. The buses cleared away and Enrique was able to see what had happened. Only the snake's head, which had been severed from its body, remained intact.

Enrique came up and stood by Lilina.

"Now are you going home?" he asked her, biting his lip.

"Look how small her head is . . . she must have been a very small snake," said Lilina.

"Are you going home to your house?" Enrique asked her again.

"No, I'm going over by the cathedral and play on the swings. Do you want to come? I'm going to run there."

"I can't run," said Enrique, touching his fingers to his bandages, "and I'm not sure that I want to go over to the playground."

"Well," said Lilina, "I'll run ahead of you and I'll be there if you decide to come."

Enrique was very tired and he felt a little dizzy, but he decided to follow her to the playground in order to ask her why she had allowed Victoria to escape under the buses.

When he arrived, Lilina was already swinging back and forth. Enrique sat on a bench near the swings and looked up at her. Each time her feet grazed the ground, he tried to ask her about Victoria, but the question stuck in his throat. At last he stood up, thrust his hands in his pockets and shouted at her.

"Are you going to get another snake?" he asked. It was not what he had intended to ask her. Lilina did not answer, but she did stare at him from the swing and it was impossible for him to tell whether or not she had heard his question.

At last she dug her heel into the ground and brought the swing to a standstill.

"I must go home," she said, "or my mother will be angry with me."

"No," said Enrique, catching hold of her dress, "come with me and let me buy you an ice."

"I will," said Lilina, "I love them."

They sat together in a little store and Enrique bought two ices.

"I'd like to have a swing hanging from the roof of my house," said Lilina, "and have my dinner and my breakfast served while I was swinging." This idea amused Lilina and she began to laugh so hard that her ice ran out of her mouth and over her chin.

"Breakfast, lunch and dinner and take a bath in the swing," she continued, "and make pipi on Consuelo's head from the swing."

Enrique was growing more and more nervous because it was getting late and still they weren't talking about Victoria.

"Could I swing with you in your house?" he asked Lilina.

"Yes, we'll have two swings and you can make pipi on Consuelo's head, too."

"I'd love to," he said.

His question seemed more and more difficult to present, and by now it seemed to him it resembled more a declaration of love than a simple question.

Finally he tried again: "Are you going to buy another snake?" But he was still incapable of asking Lilina why she had been so careless. "No," said Lilina, "I'm going to buy a rabbit."

"A rabbit?" said Enrique; "but rabbits aren't as intelligent or as beautiful as snakes. You had better buy another snake like Victoria."

"Rabbits have lots of children," said Lilina, "why don't we buy a rabbit together?"

Enrique thought about this for a while. He began to feel almost lighthearted and even a little wicked.

"All right," he said, "let's buy two rabbits, a man and a woman." They finished their ices and talked together more and more excitedly about the rabbits.

On the way home, Lilina squeezed Enrique's hand and kissed him all over his cheeks. Enrique was red with pleasure.

At the square they parted, after promising to meet each other again that afternoon.

It was a cloudy day, rather colder than usual, and Señora Ramirez decided to dress in her mourning clothes, which she always carried with her. She hung several strands of black beads around her neck and powdered her face heavily. She and Consuelo began to walk slowly around the patio.

Consuelo blew her nose.

"Ay, Mamá," she said, "isn't it true that there is a greater amount of sadness in the world than happiness?"

"I don't know why you are thinking about this," replied her mother.

"Because I have been counting my happy days and my sad days. There are many more sad days and I am living now at the best age for a girl. There is nothing but fighting even at balls. I would not believe any man if he told me he liked dancing better than fighting."

"This is true," said her mother, "but all men are not really like this. There are some men who are as gentle as little lambs, but not so many."

"I feel like an old lady. I think that maybe I will feel better when I'm married." They walked slowly past the traveler's closed door.

"I'm going inside," said Consuelo suddenly.

"Aren't you going to sit in the patio?" her mother asked her.

"No, with all those children screaming and the chickens and the parrot talking and the white dog—and it's such a terrible day—Why?"

Señora Ramirez could not think of any reason why Consuelo should stay in the patio; in any case she preferred to be there alone if the stranger should decide to talk to her.

"What white dog?" she asked.

"Señora Espinoza has bought a little white dog for the children."

The wind was blowing and the children were chasing each other around the back patio. Señora Ramirez sat down on one of the little straight-backed chairs, with her hands folded in her lap. The thought came into her mind that most days were likely to be cold and windy rather than otherwise, and that there would be many days to come exactly like this one. Unconsciously she had always felt that these were the days preferred by God, although they had never been very much to her own liking.

The traveler was packing with a vivacity familiar to those who are in the habit of making little excursions away from the charmed fold only to return almost immediately.

"Wow!" he said joyfully to himself. "I sure have been giddy in this place, but the bad dream is over now." It was nearly bus time and he carried his grips out to the patio. He was confused to find that Señora Ramirez was sitting there, and he prompted himself to be pleasant.

"Señora," he said, walking over to her, "it's goodbye now till we meet again."

"What do you say?" she asked.

"I'm taking the twelve o'clock bus. I'm going home."

"Ah, you must be very happy to go home." She did not think of looking away from the traveler's face. "Do you take a boat?" she asked, staring harder.

"Yes, five days on the boat."

"How wonderful that must be. Or maybe it makes you sick." She put her hand over her stomach.

"I have never been seasick in my life."

She said nothing to this.

He backed against the parrot swinging on its perch, and stepped forward again quickly as it leaned to bite him.

"Is there anyone you would like me to look up in the United States?"

"No. You will be coming back in not such a long time?"

"No, I don't think I will come back here again. Well—" He put out his hand and she stood up. She was fairly impressive in her black clothes and he looked at the beads that covered her chest.

"Well, goodbye, Señora, I was very happy to have met you."

"Adios, Señor, and may God protect you on your trip. You will be coming back maybe. You don't know."

He shook his head and walked over to the Indian boy standing by his luggage. They went out into the street and the heavy door closed with a bang. Señora Ramirez looked around the patio. She saw Señorita Cordoba move away from the half open bedroom door where she had been standing.

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN

The New War and Peace: *a Speculation*

First, a disclaimer. The title of this essay raises two questions, both misleading and both a little embarrassing. First: what's the matter with the old *War and Peace?* Second: where *is* the new *War and Peace,* and may we have a look at it? The answer to the first is: nothing, or at least very little. The answer to the second is: nowhere, as yet.

The point of taking *War and Peace* as a springboard for a discussion of war literature in general and the literature of this war in particular is that you know where you stand. Despite a lot of loose talk, *War and Peace* is probably not the greatest novel ever written (although at the moment I am not prepared to say what is), but it can nevertheless be taken as a kind of optimum of war writing. Though Tolstoy perhaps lacked the all-embracing humanity to be found in Cervantes or Balzac, or the psychological insight of Melville or Dostoyevsky, he had a breadth and comprehension found in none of them, and was thus possibly best equipped to handle the limitless subject matter of a major war.

Taking *War and Peace* as a standard for war writing satisfactory in the largest sense of the word, the aim of this essay is to discuss the conditions under which a comparable great work could arise to express our own war, and as a by-product, to survey what writing expressive of the war we have already had. Along this line of inquiry, various general questions raised by the nature and necessities of war writing must be discussed, and some attempt must be made to resolve the fundamental specific problems: which elements of *War and Peace* and of Tolstoy himself are intrinsic to the book's greatness and which irrelevant? This essay will concern itself roughly with those questions.

First, some brief factual discussion of *War and Peace* is necessary. It is a large historical novel, comprising fifteen Books and two Epilogues, dealing with several campaigns of the Napoleonic Wars, notably: the fighting in Austria and Moravia in 1805 which culminated in the Battle of Austerlitz; the fighting in Poland and Prussia in 1807 which culminated in peace and an alliance between Napoleon and Emperor Alexander of Russia; and Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Russia in 1812. Interwoven with this military and historical material are accounts of a vast number of fictional and real persons, almost exclusively Russian, in the years from 1805 to 1820, particularly the members of four or five fictitious Russian noble families.

Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* in the years between 1863 and 1869, roughly half a century after the events he deals with. He was thirty-five years old when he began the book and, while writing it, lived, as he lived all his life, on the proceeds from his estate. His historical information for the book was obtained from histories, old records of many sorts, personal accounts and family tradition. He was tremendously informed on the subject and was able to correct the formal historians on a number of points. His principal characters in the book are chiefly drawn from members of his family in that period, his grandparents, parents and relatives, while the timeless aspects of his two chief male characters, Andrew and Pierre, draw chiefly on his own character and experience and that of an elder brother.

Tolstoy's military background came from personal experience. He entered the Russian army as a cadet in 1851, and served against the Caucasian mountain tribes until 1854, when he obtained a commission in the artillery. When the Crimean War broke out later that year, he asked to be transferred to the front, and from November 1854 to September 1855 he served in the defense of Sevastopol against the French and the English. When the war ended he retired from the army and spent the rest of his life in educational work, writing and the management of his estate.

The choice of subject-matter seems to have been in no sense compulsory, at least on a conscious level. Tolstoy's first project for his vast historical novel was the Decembrist movement, an early revolutionary ferment which culminated in the 1825 outbreak, but in studying its sources, he found himself increasingly drawn to the Napoleonic invasion.

Structurally, the book is two interwoven novels, one the story of the handful of Russian noble families and the other the story of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, each so extensive and organized that neither can properly be said to be background for the other. Symbolically, the book centers around a conversion or rebirth story, with the war serving as a vast rebirth ritual, whereby a number of personalities are turned from identification with the aristocracy to identification with the peasants. Of the three principal male characters, one, Prince Andrew Bolkonski, is killed in the war, a second, Count Nicholas Rostov, comes back from the war to become a farmer drawing on his serfs for knowledge and understanding, and a third, Count Pierre Besukhov, is directly converted to a new way of life by a peasant named Karataev whom he meets in a French prison camp, and when Karataev dies, Pierre "puts on" his personality. The book ends on the promise of achievement by young Nicholas Bolkonski, Andrew's son, who, in being brought up by Nicholas and in venerating Pierre, partakes symbolically of all three personalities and their conversion experiences. The central meaning of the book would thus seem to be an allegorical statement about the Russian ruling class, which is reborn in the "people's war" under peasant auspices and merges in a symbol of youth, hope and identification with peasant interests and social progress.

Actually, in terms of space, Tolstoy devoted little attention to the peasants. The chief characters are all noble, all the characters in the first half of the book are of the ruling class except for a few servants, and only after the 1812 invasion has begun, in the latter half of the book, do a few peasant characters emerge, notably the Karataev who unconsciously "converts"

Pierre. Thus, Tolstoy is actually not showing a cross-section of Russian life, as is frequently claimed, but is showing a cross-section of Russian upper-class life, with the rest of Russian society registering only on the symbolic level.

Along with this omission, the charge is frequently leveled that Tolstoy's account is not true to the period, that it skims over the worst aspects of it. Tolstoy himself attempted to refute this charge in an article called *Some Words About 'War and Peace.'* He wrote[1]:

> *The character of the period.* When the first part of this book appeared, some readers told me that this is not sufficiently defined in my work. To that reproach I make the following reply: I know what "the characteristics of the period" are that people do not find in my novel—the horrors of serfdom, the immuring of wives, the flogging of grown-up sons . . . and so on; but I do not think that these characteristics of the period as they exist in our imagination are correct, and I did not wish to reproduce them. On studying letters, diaries, and traditions, I did not find the horrors of such savagery to a greater extent than I find them now, or at any other period. In those days also people loved, envied, sought truth and virtue, and were carried away by passion; and there was the same complex mental and moral life among the upper classes, who were in some instances even more refined than now. If we have come to believe in the perversity and coarse violence of that period, that is only because the traditions, memoirs, stories, and novels that have been handed to us record for the most part exceptional cases of violence and brutality. To suppose that the predominant characteristic of that period was turbulence is as unjust as it would be for a man seeing nothing but the tops of trees beyond a hill, to conclude that there was nothing to be found in that locality but trees. That period had its own characteristics (as every epoch has) which resulted from the predominant alienation of the upper class from other classes, from the religious philosophy of the time, from peculiarities of education, from the habit of using the French language, and so forth. That is the character I tried to depict as well as I could.

Without here discussing the adequacy of Tolstoy's defense, it is sufficient to observe that he is not only markedly on the defensive, but that he feels called upon to affirm his chief concern with the Russian upper classes. Along this line, it is worth noting that Tolstoy's interest in revolutionary movements is reflected in the book, not in terms of the real social agitation continually going on among all classes in Russia, but chiefly in elaborate attention to the Masonic movement, a very dilute liberalism for the upper class.

Finally, the book is built around a theory of history, which can be very crudely paraphrased as a kind of causeless predestination, with strong emphasis on the role of the mass of people, rather than their nominal leaders. Tolstoy studies the way men move historically, emerging with the theory that they are physically active in historical phenomena in inverse proportion to the extent of their leadership and understanding, but he can find no directing cause for the movement, other than the rather broad one that it is somehow God's will. Negatively, he is at least convinced that it is not leadership or ideas that make them move. Thus he simplifies the Napoleonic wars repeatedly as a massive human movement eastward and then a massive counter-movement westward. This theory of history is given so much space in the book, from long didactic digressions in the body of the book to the entire second Epilogue, that it can almost be claimed that *War and Peace* was written to demonstrate and affirm it.

---

[1] Quotations and spellings throughout are from the Louise and Aylmer Maude translation in the Simon & Schuster edition.

The above brief skimming of *War and Peace* raises a number of general questions concerning war writing in our time, or the new *War and Peace,* and requires some attempt to classify the above data into "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" categories. These questions may be briefly stated:

Is the historical novel the most adequate or the only form for a satisfactory work of art built around a war? Has the answer to this question changed from Tolstoy's time to our own? In other words, would the new *War and Peace* have to be an historical novel?

Is half a century, or some comparable time, necessary before a war can be transmuted into great art?

Must our author share Tolstoy's affirmative attitude toward the war, must he regard it generally as an ethical "good"?

Must the war itself be what Tolstoy described as a "people's war," what we tend to call a "war of national liberation," a "defensive war," a "revolutionary war," or a war against tyranny and aggression of one sort or another? Corollary question: Is our war comparable to Tolstoy's?

Can our author be a participant in the war with which he is dealing, as Tolstoy was not, and does he require comparable military experience, which Tolstoy had?

Must our author's canvas be as vast as Tolstoy's?

Would he require Tolstoy's historical theory, or any historical theory?

Finally, what other special characteristics are required of the author of a new *War and Peace,* like genius, the accident of birth, previous literary experience and preparation, independent income, precedent literary tradition, etc.?

In summary, is a new *War and Peace* possible to express our present war against fascism and, if so, under what conditions?

After a brief analysis of contemporary war writing and its conditions, some attempt will be made to answer as many of those questions as seem to be answerable.

Before analyzing the writing in this war, it might be profitable to take a brief look at a few examples of the writing that came out of the last World War. Although only twenty-five years have elapsed, as opposed to Tolstoy's half a century, there has been a substantial body of it.

As far as time goes, one of the great classics of the war, Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire*, was actually published in 1917, while the war was still going on. Of what are probably the five major American novels of the war, all but one were published in the twenties: John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* in 1921, E. E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room* in 1922, William Faulkner's *Soldier's Pay* in 1926, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929, and William March's *Company K* in 1933. The most important (although certainly not the best) German war book, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, appeared in 1928. Most of the principal war plays, like Anderson and Stalling's "What Price Glory" and Sheriff's "Journey's End," also appeared in the twenties.

There are a few special cases. Jules Romains' vast book on the war, which appears doggedly volume by volume, is still being written, and what may yet turn out to be the major book of the war, the Polish Josef Wittlin's *Saga of the Patient Foot-Soldier*, is not yet complete. One volume, published in America as *Salt of the Earth*, was written in the years from 1925 to 1935, and the other two volumes are still in preparation. Finally, the most impressive book of the last war period can be classified as a "war" book only by stretching a point. It is Mikhail Sholokhov's *The Silent Don*, and it is primarily a book about the Russian revolution and civil war, written from 1925 to 1940.

These books share many characteristics. Except for Sholokhov's, which actually deals with a different struggle, and Romains', which changes its point of view from volume to volume, they all violently oppose the war they center around. With one or two exceptions, all were written or begun in the twenties. With the possible exception of Romains, all the authors saw military service of some sort, even if some of it was pretty remote from action. Their characteristic form is the personal novel, on a far smaller canvas than Tolstoy's, although Romains', Wittlin's and Sholokhov's are exceptions, and in the case of the Sholokhov book, the similarity to *War and Peace* is unmistakable.

The difference between the last World War itself and Tolstoy's Napoleonic Wars is worth noting. Tolstoy recognized the fact that the central character of the Russian war effort was the fact that it was a vast national struggle to drive out an invader, a "people's war," and that despite the Russian tyranny, some revolutionary aspects of Napoleon's army, and such stubborn realistic complications to any easy over-simplification, the Russian cause was essentially "good" in a moral sense. None of the above-mentioned writers of the last World War had any such idea about the war in which they were involved. Their views of it range from Barbusse's Marxist conception of it as an "imperialist" war to the simple and unpolitical detestation of suffering, cruelty and death that some of the young Americans had. On any level they chose to describe it, it was an objectionable and fundamentally meaningless war.

The poets, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and the rest, came to the same conclusions, frequently in even more violent terms. There was certainly a literature affirming the war, but the vast majority of it was written quickly during the war, was of a low artistic order and, in the intervening years, has become as dead as the sheet music showing Elsie Janis singing to the boys. The special character of all the serious literature of the last war is that it was opposed to the war, and consequently tended to be limited, personal, negativistic, and, even the best of it, somehow unsatisfactory. The definitive novel of the last World War may yet be written, possibly after Tolstoy's half century, but it is hard to believe that it will be a new *War and Peace*.

No two people quite agree on when the present war began, other than the purely formal date in 1939, but it is probably safe to say that the first substantial body of literature we had from the war came out of Spain. At least two of the books were major writing, Gustav Regler's *The Great Crusade* and André Malraux's *Man's Hope*, and at least one of them was the most pretentious piece of trash ever turned out by a major writer, Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway's book was an attempt (and a successful attempt) to make something titillating for the movie audiences out of the bitter tragedy of Spain, and is of no importance in a discussion of serious writing. The other two books were very similar in both their strength and their limitations. Both authors fought in Spain, and wrote of parts of the Spanish War with great passion and over a major sweep, but in each case the necessity of taking only a part of the war, a "hopeful" part (it is significant that Malraux's book, with its title, was even published before the war ended) limited their possibilities. In the last analysis, their books were kept from greatness by the fate of the war itself. Had the Loyalists won, a *War and Peace* might have arisen, but with the war lost in a debauch of shame and betrayal, the only possible affirmation had to be partial.

Only one book with which this country is familiar has come out of China's heroic war effort, T'ien Chun's *Village in August*. Published in 1935, it deals with the guerrilla resistance of Manchurian peasants to the Japanese invasion of their land following the Mukden incident of 1931. The author, a professional soldier and untrained writer, achieved remarkable success, his novel being the first modern Chinese work to catch on with literally millions of readers and to have a measurable effect in achieving the unity against the Japanese that is the basic ingredient of the Chinese war effort. *Village in August* was thus the first real achievement of the new Chinese "people's literature." However, the very simplicity and vigor that made the book popular with a mass audience, and the absence of a Chinese tradition in the modern novel comparable to that of the Western World, made the book too limited to be the comprehensive, all-embracing war novel we are after.

At least one major war book has come out of the Russian war effort, Boris Voyetekhov's *The Last Days of Sevastopol*, a job of reporting rather than a novel. Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Fall of Paris*, at least as a novel of the war, is an ambitious failure, centering too exclusively on the depressing and intricate political life of France. It is particularly interesting, however, as the only attempt (outside of a long, bad novel by a young American, Paul Hughes, called *Retreat from Rostov*) to write a serious war novel about a country not the writer's own. (That word "serious" excludes Steinbeck's hack job and a few others.) Besides *The Last Days of Sevastopol*, an incomparably fine and moving job and far and away the best reporting to come out of the war, there has been a good deal of superior Russian reportage of the war, notably by Ehrenburg, Eugene Petrov and Poliakov, the last two afterwards killed in action. Much of this reporting, particularly Voyetekhov's superb work, could undoubtedly serve as the basis for a major war novel, and there is a strong possibility that in the future it will so serve, but there have been no major novels of the Russian war effort, at least available in English, to date.

The British war effort has so far produced little writing of value. There have been a few interesting volumes of soldier stories, the best of them by Alun Lewis and H. E. Bates, and one or two worthwhile home front novels, but no large-scale fictional treatment of the war has appeared as yet. Perhaps the most exciting British books have been records of personal experience; among them a very moving account of air battle called *Falling Through Space* by a young flier named Richard Hilary, later killed in action, two volumes of sea experiences by Nicholas Montsarrat and a characteristically English book on Dunkerque called *Sword of Bone,* by a young man named Anthony Rhodes.

Some of the best war books have come out of France, outstanding among them Vladimir Pozner's deeply moving story of the French defeat, *Edge of the Sword,* Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *Flight to Arras,* and one or two others by Hans Habe and Jean Malaquais. These have been almost exactly of a type; heartbreaking, very personal accounts of confusion, treachery, and meaningless activity; invaluable social documentation and moving literature, but very different from the major historical affirmation that would parallel Tolstoy's masterpiece.

In all four countries, it should be noted, there has been a good deal of war poetry. Except for one or two poems by Louis Aragon and poets of his stature, little of the French war poetry has been available to us, for obvious reasons, and Chinese war poetry, reputed blooming in great profusion, has been almost entirely unknown in the West. However, a good deal of British poetry and Russian verse in translation has appeared in America. Russia seems to be in a midst of a furious poetic renascence, written in close association with the physical fighting—read to soldiers and factory workers, put to music and sung throughout the country, etc.—and although a good part of it seems (at least in the generally crude English translations) to be not much more than very moving doggerel, its vigor and affirmation are undeniable.

Britain's poetic experience is worth noting. A great deal of war poetry has been written, a typical sample of it published in America in 1942 in a volume called *Poems of This War by Younger Poets,* and almost without exception it has been technically proficient, sterile and, as far as the war itself is concerned, either opposed to it or utterly passive. The attitudes are exactly the attitudes of the Georgian poetry of the last war, reproduced almost image for image; the same sense of futility, boredom, deep distrust of "issues" or "causes," and physical loathing of the blood and dirt of war. If it is true that this war differs fundamentally from the last one—and if nothing else, the prose literature that has already come out of it would bear out that statement—then these attitudes in the younger British poets are functionless hand-me-downs, true neither to their own experience nor to the general temper of the British people. It is beyond the scope of this essay to attempt to explain this phenomenon (which can also be seen in a majority of the serious American war poems, particularly those written by soldiers), but there is no blinking the reality away.

A particularly interesting phenomenon is the refugee German, Austrian and Czech literature, which has appeared in America in some profusion, and has included some of the best writing of the war. Far and away the finest book in this group is Anna Seghers' deeply moving anti-Nazi novel, *The Seventh Cross,* about the German Underground in wartime, but Stefan Heym's *Hostages* and F. C. Weiskopf's *Dawn Breaks,* both about Underground resistance in conquered Czechoslovakia, achieve similar emotional impact on a somewhat lesser literary level. Essentially, all three books are adventure stories, in the best sense of the word, and although this is almost inevitable in novels about the Underground, it so limits the possible scope as to make them, at best (as in Miss Seghers' case), the triumph of the intensive war story, just as Tolstoy's book is the triumph of the extensive.

At this writing, America has been at war more than two years, and no single satisfactory piece of war writing has appeared. There has been a vast flood of war books of every type, with each of the publishers scrambling for the gravy with a correspondent's book or two, a soldier's book or two, and so on; almost all of them trivial and just about interchangeable. So far there has been no major novel centering around the war, and very few war novels of any sort.

The principal, and most numerous, war books have been correspondents' accounts of the fighting they have witnessed. Of the enormous crop to date, the best orthodox jobs have probably been John Hersey's book on Bataan and Ira Wolfert's on the fighting in the Solomons. Both are greatly outclassed by A. J. Liebling's *The Road Back to Paris,* an unorthodox, *New Yorker*ish book on a high literary level. Dealing with the war as seen from England, France and North Africa, Liebling's reporting is so far unmatched by any but the best of the Russians.

Soldier books have been almost as profuse. They divide into three clearly marked groups: training-camp experiences, almost always funny, like Marion Hargrove's *See Here Private Hargrove,* E. J. Kahn, Jr.'s *The Army Life,* and at least half a dozen more; adventures abroad, like Thomas R. St. George's *C/o Postmaster* and Kahn's second book, *G. I. Jungle;* and accounts of actual battle experience. These last have been mostly by aviators, like Colonel Robert Scott's *God Is My Co-Pilot* and Lieutenant Thomas Moore's *The Sky Is My Witness,* for the obvious reason that only a very small percentage of American land forces have so far seen action and of those very few men have had a chance to write about it. One ground soldier, Major Ralph Ingersoll, has written a remarkably fine book, *The Battle Is the Pay-Off,* about a small Tunisian battle in which he participated, but as a result of his newspaper preoccupation it tends to be more a correspondent's impersonal record than a soldier's personal record, despite Ingersoll's active participation.

Somewhere between the correspondent's book and the soldier's book are the large number of books of war experiences "told to" a reporter. William L. White's two books, *They Were Expendable* and *Queens Die Proudly* were the most widely read, if hardly the best, of this group. Actually, almost all the soldier books of action have had some degree of professional assistance, from very heavy editing to outright ghosting, and the chief achievement of the White books was in setting a style for publishing them frankly as the work of the reporter, rather than faking them as the work of the soldier.

A special type of the "experience" books, of real importance symbolically, are the "raft" stories, the accounts of the incredible survival of shipwrecked men. The first of these was British, Guy Pearce Jones' *Two Survived,* an account of two shipwrecked British sailors who spent seventy-three days in a longboat. It was followed by two excellent American books, Robert Turnbull's *The Raft,* the story of the three American Navy airmen who spent thirty-four days on a tiny rubber raft, and Mark Murphy's *83 Days,* the story of Seaman Izzi and two Dutch companions who lived for eighty-three days on a slat raft. In Murphy's case, the excellence of the reporting raised the story to the level of minor art, but all three books share an importance inherent in their subject-matter. The abstraction from all reality, other than naked survival, in the "raft" stories has made them perhaps the most deeply moving adventures of the war, possibly the same sort of central symbol for our day that Robinson Crusoe's little capitalist Utopia was for the eighteenth century.

Around the fringes of the soldier and war-experience books have been a vast number of commercial projects designed to catch the army book market: soldier plays, soldier poetry, soldier diaries, little funny books about the WACs, collections of soldier letters, army cartoons, army jokes, etc. Some of this ephemera has been on a fairly high level, like Dave Breger's book of army cartoons, the parody soldier book that Harry Brown wrote and Ralph Stein illustrated and the collections of war letters, many of them of serious documentary importance and real emotional interest, but none of this material bears any particular relationship to literature.

The major importance of the soldier books has been their function as symbolic action. At each stage of the military career, a tremendous psychological adjustment, almost a rebirth, is necessary, and universally the writers have used their writing to facilitate that adjustment. Most of the soldier books so far have been occupied with the primary stage, the transition from civilian to uniformed civilian in training camp, and this adjustment has been almost universally achieved through humor, or a coming to grips with real problems on the level of farcical exaggeration; the comic tyrant sergeant as a shorthand notation for army discipline, etc. The books facilitating the next rebirth, the adjustment to being a soldier abroad, with the life-and-death existence of the fighting man very close, have used the therapy of humor to a lesser extent, relying more heavily on solving problems on the realistic level of thought. The adjustment to actual battle experience, facing the fundamental problems of killing in terms of both personal morality and the social morality involved in the larger meanings of the war, has been almost unchronicled by American soldiers to date. Out of this final adjustment can come the only major war literature, but, in defense of the more superficial books, it can be said that only after the rebirths they chronicle have been achieved in some form or other can a soldier come to grips with the larger problems out of which serious war writing may arise.

When American writing on the war can be reduced to correspondents' books and soldier books, the obvious question remains: what are our writers doing? Whatever they are doing, it has little to do with the war. Hemingway, perhaps the foremost living American novelist, has published nothing besides an anthology of war writing, to which he contributed an introduction suggesting that all Germans be sterilized. Steinbeck wrote a glorified recruiting pamphlet for the Army Air Forces called *Bombs Away*, as literature something less than *The Grapes of Wrath*. Farrell has spent the time since America's entry into the war concluding the dreary tetralogy of Danny O'Neill and is reported to be now at work on a new documentation of the "New York intellectual." Dos Passos has come no closer to the war than a bad fictionalization of the career of Huey Long. Faulkner is still dredging up Mississippi genealogy. Sinclair Lewis wrote a book exposing the "philanthrobbers." Erskine Caldwell, after one or two books reporting the Russian war effort, did an incredibly flimsy novel about Russian guerrillas. In short, almost all our principal novelists have so far avoided the war and stayed right in their own grooves. The younger men, the new names of the Thirties, are either actively engaged in fighting, so that their books will not appear until after the war, are busy making patchwork quilts in Hollywood, or, in one or two cases, are writing competent books that come no closer to the war than peripheral aspects of the home front. A few young writers in the Army, notably John Cheever, Jerome Weidman, Edward Newhouse and Irwin

Shaw, have produced impressive short stories around war themes. But the general pattern is one of almost total avoidance.

On the basis of this fragmentary review of the writing of the last war and what writing has so far appeared dealing with this war, some attempt can be made to answer the questions raised by *War and Peace.*

It seems obvious that the novel is the only adequate form for presenting the total effect of modern war. The poem, play or movie is too fragmentary, capable at best of giving only a flash of insight. Reporting, even at its highest level, like Voyetekhov's *The Last Days of Sevastopol,* lacks the added depth and perspective of fiction's fully realized human personalities. Short stories or humorous sketches are obviously too flimsy. Moreover, it would seem that not only is the novel form a requisite, but that it must be, like *War and Peace,* the large-scale historical novel. The more limited personal novels of the last war and this, even the very best of them, like *Under Fire* or *The Seventh Cross,* give no sense of the totality of a war, but only the totality of a single human experience. In a day of simpler war, when only a small group of fighting men were actually affected, the epic poem or saga was the natural form to express this single dramatic line of movement. With the multidimensional complexity of war in modern times, when whole nations are affected, only the historical novel is adequate, and this is even truer in our own day of total war than in Tolstoy's day of limited warfare.

The question of time-lag is hard to answer. Some lag is obviously necessary, since even the writing of the last war took approximately a decade to mature, and after almost two years of this war America has produced nothing. It would seem, however, that all of Tolstoy's half-century lag is unnecessary today. It may have been accidental in his case, but even assuming its necessity, conditions have changed markedly since then. In Tolstoy's case, the fifty years between the Napoleonic Wars and his writing were just about time enough for the historical documentation to be assembled and some perspective on events to be achieved. In our own day, elaborate newspaper coverage, radio, and the constant stream of tiny pieces on the war in magazines and books, permit a fairly true mosaic of the entire war to be assembled every morning and a perspective to be brought to bear on it every afternoon. Obviously, a few years after the war are necessary for other truths to emerge, hysterias to die down and attitudes and meanings to be established, and a few more years for the slow and careful writing of a vast work, but there seems to be no reason why a new *War and Peace,* if one were to appear in our time, could not appear within a decade after the end of the war. The fact that Tolstoy chose a historical event, not of his own time, but of his father's or grandfather's, seems to have no discernible bearing on its success, and in many cases, like the difficulty of obtaining adequate first-hand accounts, undoubtedly made it more difficult.[2]

With regard to the writer's attitude toward the war, it would seem that affirmation is necessary. As we have seen above, all the serious literature of the last war was oppositional, and even the best of it, like Barbusse's book or the classic American war novels, was forced out of the historical path into the personal. In a war you approve, it would seem, you can affirm the collective whole; in a war you disapprove there seems to be nothing to affirm but the dignity of the individual human personality,[3] which, valuable as it is, is quite another sort of book. The literature of this war, however, seems overwhelmingly affirmative, although to date markedly limited in other regards, and it may be that, in regard to this condition at least, a work comparable to *War and Peace* could arise out of this war as it could not have out of the last.

This dichotomy of attitude leads into the next question, the objective nature of the war itself. Wars are not simple blacks and whites, some good and some bad, some "people's" wars and some "imperialist" wars. By the multiplicity of its nature, a war, or even the war effort of a single country, partakes of all social elements and characteristics, so that it may be at once, in part, defensive and aggressive, progressive and imperialist, revolutionary and conservative. There is of necessity, however, a predominant characteristic, so that a war can be viewed as of one sort, with other elements treated as flaws, compromises or unfortunate features of it. By the dynamic nature of social action, a war thus fought and thought of in terms of its central direction loses these contradictory features to some extent in the very acts of fighting and classification and thus tends increasingly to assume a single consistent character. For this reason, it is possible to speak of a war in such oversimplified terms of "imperialist," "people's," etc.

By almost general agreement, the Russian resistance to Napoleon's invasion described by Tolstoy was a "people's war," as are, to varying degrees, the resistances of the various United Nations to fascist aggression. By even more general agreement (despite the recent and rather foolish effort of a few editorial Solons to simplify matters by rewriting the last war in terms of this one), the war efforts of all the major powers in the last World War were predominantly "imperialist." Thus, in a general sense, the present war is comparable to Tolstoy's and the last war was comparable to neither. A remarkably accurate description of the "popular" nature of the present war is the incomparable first chapter of Book Fourteen of *War and Peace,* in which Tolstoy describes the French war effort in the imagery of a formal duel with rapier and the Russian war effort as a life-and-death defense with a cudgel.

---

[2] The real reason for Tolstoy's choice would seem to be below the level of consciousness. His obsessive personal necessity was to affirm the social "good" of the Russian ruling class to which he belonged. Thus he required a historical period when his class did serve a progressive function, and the Napoleonic Wars were the obvious instance. In general, the historical novel tends to project the writer's personal conflict onto the large canvas of history, and the historical novelist's choice of subject matter, although theoretically "free," actually tends to be limited to historical events which answer his personal necessities and compulsions.

[3] (Or, like Jean Malaquais, you can affirm nothing whatsoever.)

Such terms for warfare as "imperialist" or "people's" have a dual nature: in part they refer to the aims and causes of the war, and in part to the type of fighting which follows from those aims and causes. Thus, as Tolstoy devoted his entire book to demonstrating, a war fought for material advantage must of necessity be fought by a limited army according to the principles of formal war, while the defense of a homeland will inevitably be fought by the mobilization of an entire united people, manifesting itself in such phenomena as "scorched-earth" and "guerrilla" fighting. In these terms, it can be said that the Chinese and Russian war efforts are almost entirely "people's" wars; the British war effort is largely "popular" but to some extent "imperialist" (the aim of holding the Empire and the consequent inability to mobilize the subject peoples); and the American war effort might be described as temporarily "popular" (in an early stage) with the constant threat of an "out" group to turn it in an imperialist direction (elements anxious to gain such imperialist advantage as island bases or post-war air control, pressure against mobilizing the Negro people, etc.). This classification, again very much over-simplified, is important in terms of the writers' attitudes that must arise from it and the necessity for affirmation as a basis for truly great war writing.

In regard to the question of an author's physical participation in the war (naturally, everyone living during a war participates to some extent, and every writer reflects it in his writing to the extent that he must take an attitude toward it, if only one of omission or of ceasing to write), no definitive answer can be given. Tolstoy believed it was impossible. He wrote in *War and Peace:*

> In historic events the rule forbidding us to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge is specially applicable. Only unconscious action bears fruit, and he who plays a part in an historic event never understands its significance.

This is part of his historical theory about the inverse ratio between participation and understanding, but is not necessarily any truer than many of Tolstoy's theories. All that can really be said to support Tolstoy's position is that *he* was not a participant in the war he describes and that he did a pretty good job on it. However, the nearest thing we have had to a *War and Peace* in our time, Sholokhov's *The Silent Don,* was written by a man who was a participant in the action he described, as was just about every other contemporary war novelist. Probably the question is irrevelant, and writing a *War and Peace* is neither made impossible by participation in the war dealt with nor particularly facilitated.

However, it is almost axiomatic that some comparable military experience is necessary for understanding. Fifty years after the Napoleonic Wars, the Russian Army and the conditions of warfare were little changed, and Tolstoy's army experience was similar enough for use. However, from that day to this the conditions of warfare have changed so markedly, from what was essentially hand-to-hand combat augmented by primitive shelling to our vast mechanical battling of tank and plane, that military experience would simply not carry over. It is at least debatable that conditions of warfare have changed so much from the last World War to this that experience would not even carry across that generation, and some military experience in this war, or one of its earlier engagements like Spain, would be requisite to writing about it adequately. If true, this would obviously solve the participation question, at least for our own time.

The question of extensiveness answers itself. Tolstoy's scope, number and variety of characters, detail, and so on, are all vital elements in the greatness of *War and Peace.* These require a major opus. To reflect the infinitely greater complexity of our own war and wartime society, a book of at least equal vastness, probably greater, would be inevitable. Perhaps only Romains, with his endless series of volumes on the last World War, is on the right track. It seems obvious that no "personal" novel, confined to the reactions of one human being and that part of the war he is capable of experiencing, could attain the epic sweep and comprehensive understanding of *War and Peace,* no matter how fine its insights. It seems a little ridiculous to make number of pages a test of greatness, yet there is no getting around the fact that to express adequately our war, any new *War and Peace* would have to be an enormous physical undertaking.

As for historical theory, it would be foolish to claim that belief in Tolstoy's theory of history is necessary for the greatness of Tolstoy's book or a contemporary equivalent. On the other hand, inadequate as the theory is actually to explain history, it served Tolstoy. Almost certainly, some theory of history is necessary, about which to organize the book and with which to make patterns of behavior meaningful. It is too easy to say that that theory would have to be Marxist or some derivative of Marxism, and yet, of the half-dozen world-views of our day which attempt to organize all history on the basis of principles, only Marxism would seem to respect both the psychological and social factors in motivation enough to permit a novelist the fullest development of both individual personality and social background, and only Marxism would seem to be dynamic enough to deal with the infinite fluidity and ceaseless readjustments of modern war.

In addition, a number of special characteristics can be listed as essential. That artistic genius of a very high order is indispensable goes without saying, and this factor alone might prevent the emergence of a *War and Peace* in our time. In addition, naturally, enough leisure or independent income is necessary to permit the writer to put in the years it would take for so monumental a work, and few writers are possessed of either. It can be presumed that the writer, like Tolstoy, would need previous literary experience and preparation, both technical and psychological. (In his *Tales of Army Life,* written several years before *War and Peace,* Tolstoy seems to have symbolically worked through the early stages of personal adjustment to war that are still occupying most of our soldier-writers, thus permitting him to go on to symbolic adjustment on the highest level, in terms of objective ethical and historical values.) It is thus highly unlikely that the new *War and Peace* could be the work of a literary unknown, although it is equally unlikely, in terms of our experience in the last war and this, that much war literature of any value is apt to come from writers already highly successful or famous.

Getting into larger questions, what is referred to above as "the accident of birth," is of real importance. The writer of a new *War and Peace* would have to be born into a family rooted in the national life of the country whose war effort he utilizes and expresses, if only to enable him, like Tolstoy, to draw on the lives and experience of his parents and grandparents. He would have to be fundamentally in sympathy with the reigning orthodoxies of that country and broadly affirmative in regard to that country's war effort, which would itself have to be of the widest popular nature.[4] Since these are principally factors outside the writer's control, they can safely be put down as "accidents of birth." It seems likely that, of the chief United Nations, these conditions would tend to favor Russia and China more than England or

---

[4] It can be set down as a rough proportion that a country's literature will be about as deeply involved in the war as is the country itself.

America, although not greatly enough to exclude the latter as possibilities. In addition, the writer would have to write in a fully developed literary tradition favorable to the formal nature of the work, the vast historical novel. The only such literary tradition is of course the European, of which America naturally partakes. This condition would seem to exclude China, although, again, not absolutely. On these terms, the likelihood is that the new *War and Peace* would be a Russian work, or at least that the chances of its creation by a Soviet writer would be rather greater than average.

In conclusion, certain conditions for a new *War and Peace* can be summarized. It would presumably be another vast historical novel, written a decade or more after the war. The author would have to be a man of leisure or some means, who had either served in the war or had some comparable military experience. He would probably be a Marxist; probably, although not inevitably, a Russian; and certainly a genius. It would not be his first book, but probably not his last either. Whether such a work, or even the fulfillment of all those conditions without the work, is likely in our time, is of course impossible to answer. All that can be said is that it is *possible* in our time, as it does not seem to have been in regard to the last war.

Getting out of the realm of theory into fact, the leading contender at present would seem to be Mikhail Sholokhov, whose *The Silent Don* is the nearest approach to *War and Peace* of our day and who fulfills the hypothetical conditions as adequately as any namable author. Whether Sholokhov could or would do it, or even whether two such vast historical works are possible in one man's creative lifetime, are questions that cannot conceivably be answered, and it is not the province of this essay to attempt the comparative evaluation of the two works that might give some clues to the answers.

Moving out of the framework of this speculation entirely, it should be admitted that nothing is less helpful to the actual course of war writing, or any writing, than an approach that concentrates on a single peak and promotes an attitude of "waiting" for the comprehensive, all-embracing work of consummate genius. The only justification that can be claimed for such an approach is that through the analysis of such a work of genius, principles about the nature of lesser writing may be discovered, in much the way *Lear* is a course in play-writing, although not in the writing of another *Lear*. Despite all such speculations, writers will go on writing what they must write, on the basis of what they have to say and how they have to say it. If this essay should lead to the production of a new *War and Peace* exactly according to formula, it would be a miracle to rank with any in

Biblical history and fully as objectionable as some of those have been. If, on the other hand, it should stimulate further awareness, among writers as well as readers, of the intimate relation existing between external social conditions and the act of artistic creation, it will have served a purpose to warrant the vastness of its pretension.

CHARLES HENRI FORD

The Face of the Earth

Sand tears fall; time's tears always falling
Fall through the mind like words in a poem.
The rollicking beast that knows its own future
Winds a rope from the desert roses,
Luminous bones no wind but memory rattles.

The mind's fingers fondle the world's hot body
And finding the world without legs or arms
Hurls it back in the bed of the void!
And I heard with horror the fatal song:
With no hands and no feet, the world crawls along.

If trees of blood could grow where blood is wasted,
One branch of its festering fruit would stop all wars,
One berry of the branch explode a poison
Black enough to rot sun, moon and stars—
If trees of blood could grow where blood is wasted.

In sleep's deep pocket the writhing key
With its heart in its throat seeks a door to open,
A window to pitch its humped heart through,
Until a hand like a frozen corpse
Lies down beside it to keep the dream warm.

Lullaby, lullaby, tiger, daughter,
The jungle of the world will take you for its own.
If nothing on the face of the earth stands still,
Nothing on the face of the earth is known;
When you stray from my fable, what will you become?

The dream-machine needs a new driver,
Poet! enemy of peace . . .
The songbird has yet to be understood,
The boundaries of sleep to be explored
And the great dead awake.

Spring, too, fools us all with flowers:
They creep across the earth's sad face
Until it seems to be smiling . . .
Another dawn, another breath to take,
And the mind's mirror searches for a sign of life.

Imagination's under the human microscope!
As far as the eye can straddle,
Be it further than heaven or hell,
Meaningless gestures of farewell
Fill the horizon with the heart's black hope.

The dark heart's hope is changed to flame
And burns the navel to a skull!
Nor waits until the world's transformed
To another world, this is the world
That cannot stay the same!

Like the voice in the fire when the fire goes out,
It seems you never were
But when the wild winds blow
My soul is covered with a voice like snow
And the seed underneath is what the mute child seeks.

The gnome continues to claim a father
It never knew, and the old man of the sea,
The seer with one eye, passes by in silence;
The woman in the black cloak reappears
And the face at the window speaks:

The half-thoughts, the distances of pain,
Have found their other selves, pain is so near
It needs no perspective to make it seem strange!
John Soul's a beggar, Tom Body's a thief,
And the sooner they know it the better it will be.

Night! night! the last land that will fall.
Honor its exiles now, its martyrs,
And the handful that defend it to the last door,
And honor even more
The mighty history of its ruins and visions.

Wonder is the watchword!
The light of day approaches like a sword.
The light of night consumes the unseen air,
Just as a white bird, gliding through noon,
Takes whiteness from the sky and gives the sky its blue.

Farewell, Tamara, bride of my best friend . . .
Now his desire will flow
With flaming tears to make your body glow.
The clouds of happiness drop their rain of horror:
In each foul pool, tomorrow stalks its prey.

Weep if you can, laugh if you must
At all that once was nothing, at everything that's dust.
But for this man, shed no tear:
The world for him is the swarming tear
Of eternity, with no face to forsake.

The heart at the end of the world feeds today
With veins that flow back to time's beginning.
And then, and what more? . . .
The more that's left unsaid, the more there is to say.
Oh the irresponsible dead that life must answer for!

The world's a mirror, to break it is to die.
The way of death is wider than the road to glory.
Man can perish through love alone.
But the wine of glory without the bread of love
Turns the tongue to stone.

The rope, the plank, the poem,
Love, life, glory, call it what you will,
Draws to a close and gives you a chilly feeling.
"The clouds are looking for the wind!"
They are going, and the children are going.

Envoi and farewell . . .
Perhaps we'll meet in hell or heaven.
And there'll be other eyes to open
And see what else there is to see
On the face of the earth that once belonged to me.

OSCAR WILLIAMS

A View from the Twentieth Story

This is the window on the twentieth story
With a face of glass and a body of air,
A league from this is an inch from that,
The circle, the children, the square.

But whose is this face so overhung
With a ponderous veil of roofs and trees,
With a mist as wide as the shoulders of the soul
And depth on its dangerous knees?

All gentleness is this mien of stone,
A silver river climbing the hair;
On the twentieth story framed in glass
I am held, an offering, in air.

A bird's-eye view from the forehead of up
Where the eyes tiptoe soundless in their track,
The distant gravestones, the leap of the bridge,
The city stretched on its back.

And I stand here wide-awake to the thought
Of the skin-soft skin on the face of the deep,
Of those who are falling who are always awake,
And those who have fallen, who sleep.

The Children's Playground

This is the children's playground, the home of the inner eye,
Surrounded by the fences and benches against the unbridled dark,
Where the prodigious exuberance of the miniature human beings
Tests the chutes of gravitation, seventeen trees from the zoo.

This is the place where the adults are grotesquely overgrown,
Where other children's parents are statues out of their niches,
Where the tree of plurals grows, where time is all over forever,
A sea of all directions for the wayward paddling of childhood.

This is the children's playground, the tenderest part of the park,
Where home buzzes behind a bush and nurse is a hillside of *don'ts,*
Where every pigeon rolls along like a slowly rolling ball
And glittering birds are falling from the hairy lips of fountains.

The squirrels here adorn the trees with the scrolls of their tails,
And sparrows, those crumbs of birds dart for their dots of bread;
The buildings stand in a crowded parade to see above each other,
The ambush of the everywhere is crowded with elbows, hats and toes.

With daylight, the common denominator, entering everything easily
The cars all day long on the streets play games of north-and-south,
And the grown-up people sit all alone in the middle of their shops,
But this is the children's playground, seventeen aeons from lunch.

EDWIN HONIG

For Entering the Dark

Oh, let us make our simple bow to Time,
troubling it no longer with our rage and ruse,
our morning rise and tugging on of socks and shoes,
our creaking gains piling up like ruins
each day where we encounter them with boredom

in the closet, in the drawer, across the table,
or far away and waiting for our claim
a thousand years now on a foreign shore,
calling to amend the failures of a leaner ancestor.

Let's return Time's kindness toward our birth's alarm
it patiently withstood and turned from with a yawn
seeing many raw mouths nibble at the dawn
or loudly threaten as passing clouds of summer
hide the sun a moment but bring no rain.
Surely it has long advised us to maneuver our blame
among clocks and miles of temples and exchanges where
we waved the razor, donned the victim's clothes, wore
fame and crosses like heroes of the bombing plane.

Who'll release us then for our arrival
at the station and the crowded train delayed
and choked with passengers who've thrown
their lives away to be on time for solo hops
where one man wins and a million lose their brains?
Who'll push our terrified wide gaze deeper
in the void where skeletons of love and forfeit
lie like fishes in the middle of a frozen pond
which hate has gnawed and guilt disposed of?

Call out the bloodhounds and the roving forest vines
to spread a net and hunt our blessed intrigues
with patent dreams and gaudy green deliverances
of bottle, pap, and shuddering aphrodisiacs.
Name the nameless in the crowd who shouted first,
"It's mine!" and move him first in line.
The chosen one will find an easy way,
define his primogeniture to plunder and betray,
and then smile stiffly for the crowd's applause.

This edition is revised; let no one consider the old
provisions, the article, the word, the faith.
The editor arrived of late has neither arms nor face
who makes a public demonstration in the car of state.

He is an angel plunged among us with one device:
abolition of the mind, the creed, the child, the race.
Let us gravely nod about, insinuate his praise
as he intrigues the looter and the jungle beast
together by his side to find their place.

Oh, admit but once that Time has yielded, is no more
about the sudden corner firing the short revolver,
is outlawed who never was a hindrance or conspirator.
Unhinge the metal wires of the body's trance
compelling operatic gestures of electric choice;
silence the clucking metronome that caught the voice,
designed the time, and boxed the compass of the dance,
to hear, ahoy! whisperings of tide, withdrawn from chance,
invite the soul to its lone dark of hushed performance.

The Entered Dark

Go! The world is hurtling by like inner landscapes
tuned to all its chosen masterpieces.
Find a spot to plant the skull and be a tree
whose multiplying serpent-head awakes the earth,
whose dewy crotch and armpits tingling with discovery
fill the startled air with whistling for
sun to send forth light and power
for seed to burst and fruit to flower.

Bless the weeping blood of difficult birth
when the ageless father leaps across the sky each day;
each day fiercer in his pride, saturates the very night
with mad expectancy, overcomes his million brides
with sudden ardent messages, leaves them sighing
in his lair, while the white sentry who relieves him
staggers dutiful and wan through aching dark
and faints upon the scream of morning's lark.

Acquaint the rivers with the body's roving magnitude,
the joints' intimate swift knack for plunging deep
and dawdling like a fish in the green-drenched mirror
tugging downward still to unplumbed miles of sleep,
or the body's flexing arch against the tide,
its cunning swoop and glide away from shore,
and by soft widening influence, its gradual climb
from flesh that like a mist dissolves itself in time.

JEAN GARRIGUE

Rat

The rat, fat, talented, shall propagate no more:
He's dead, dead, I saw him, he is dead.
And all his Friday tracks upon the composition floor
Are individual now, unique; none but he
May duplicate them, he's dead, dead, he
Cannot.

He on my books spoiled all my privacy;
He was a panther, python. I shook, cried
And left the room to him, thoughtless monster,
Who carried plague, crossed seas and, cunning,
Balanced eggs across a rope
Or in a warehouse ate a deadman's heart.

In the dark where was he, his eyes what heart?
He feared not. O civilization! O mores!
His generations eat at the root.

"That white rat in a laboratory who is
Subtler than humans (the rat student says)
So unpredictable, resourceful, capricious with
Food boxes, and the rapid runner of the maze,
Is my friend. I spend hours in his naked best

Company; he gives clues the coarse human fattened
By his consolations cannot. From him I'll learn
What animals the mother is, what frustrations madden,
Madden, what glee of turning subtilizes want."

But last night he was loose.
Would he come up the stairs, in the three possible rooms
Where was he?
The house was ruined for me.
Never, never, never.

His death leaves me free
But changed. He came that time when I
Was weak. He showed what asylums my house was, heart.

Poem

The moon has thinned; endurance wears it down;
And I must wait until it swells again
And my heart flares, full as that light
Which generates no thing, and burns
When I have brought my friends around,
All caution mocked and futures owned.

So long a living in the savage skull
Accustoms me to no companionable thing
But beasts whose holy certitude walks forth
Like Daniel from their den: my shame, shame.
Yet when I meet these comrades of my choice
All doubt that sued the Vatican

And emptiness inhabiting ambition
Will blush; for there's a marrow in the heart
That only lives by interchange of speech.
As what belief has being in the tomb?
Take mirror away and objectivity,
The hermit is a monster in God's mind.

The shrunken moon now mimics in my room.
I dramatize my patience till the time
When common speech may purify
That moon against the wrinkled pane
And image of the waiting tomb defy
As lions did love Daniel in his doom.

Primer of Plato

All endeavor to be beautiful:
The loved and the loveless as well:
All women rob from duty's time
To pitch adornment to its prime.
The lion in his golden coat
Begets his joy by that; his mate
Beneath that fiery mane repeats
The fury of each sudden sense.
The swan reflecting on the stream
The opposite feathers of the swan-
Webbed dream is like the fox at night
Who glows as in original delight.
Not least, the sun in tedious round
Bestows on rock and land
Principles that all creation
Imitates in adoration.

I never knew this till I
Chanced to see how your bright cheek
Brightened from the gaze of one
Who swam a spirit's Hellespont.
I saw then that beauty was
Both for lover and beloved a feast,
The lover mirroring by his joy
That flush beauty brings, in
His eye her actual face globed small,
And beauty flattered by that glass
Pitched to its highest comeliness,

Doubled and increased until
Both would seem what beauty is
And all would be
Derived back into first essence.
Both animals and men dwell
In such a mirror of the real
Until in sudden ecstasy
They break the boundaries of that glass
To be the image each first was.

ROBERT TALLMAN

What It Was Like

In a time of passion
I met no passionate man or woman:
In a time of illness
The healers of bodies sat in offices.

In a time of sorrow
I saw no man or woman weeping:
On a sterile morning
My friend bore a son like nothing:

Like nothing but a frown
With enormous hands and feet;
A voice full grown in the womb
Like an eagle shrieking.

Anger like a crown
Tall and glittering
He wore, he wore,
The son my friend bore.

Now all ye metaphysical birds
Sing loud in lamentation
Now—or forever keep the silence.

Unchurched, the rich pilgrim leaves our land,
Leaves you to tread alone
The lime-spattered rafters of churchly confusion.

The time of distribution of grain
Has gone and the harvest hoarded:
Not a gleaned grain given: nor husk

To the hungering: nor now even
The granary gates swing open
To bid us welcome in their sleep. . . .

For I lived in a time of dreams made flesh
And the dreamers denied them:
In a time of passion
And met no passionate man or woman:

In a time of sorrow without weeping,
Of war without anger, of discovery
Without deliverance: in a time of science
And met no knowledgeable man or woman.

But on a sterile morning
My friend bore a son

Like nothing but a frown
And anger like a crown
He wore, he wore,
The son my friend bore.

Landscape of Days

I

Here in the middle-waste upon this hill
A calm unpunctual man once saw the sun
Climb bloody out of hell as a hurt hand
Comes dripping from beneath a wheel,

And sound came to the hill as heavy as
Water though not palpable as blood
And left upon each eye a scale; and mocked
Him thus in the first sun, dry and hard

And brittle as a scale. Here in the strange
Recurring amber of his days, from a dry
Unyielding throat, through the thin phlegm
Crying, came words with no voice,

As they had from his unmocked fathers in
The moving beauty of their years: their cold
Boys'-eyes nostalgic at the last;
The great trees inland smothering out the sea.

And fear grew in him as a thunder's deep
Foreboding: no bitterness of angels
With the drooping wings and masked heads
Brought this image down: but fire

Burned in the reddened hands like lightning
And the Word was weariness: the flesh the mathematic
Of his toil: and that was the day, ghost
Of a day, day without end and wasted:

And that was today, inland, hero and mythos
Of the bloody Wheel: magenta eyes betraying
Cryptogram under skull and all else saying:
Here is the inland place, my fathers rest

Under this hill; remember; walked willingly
And without words; built beautifully and perished
Gently, in the season of mouldering leaves,
Wan weather for willows, the year of Portents.

II

Hero on hill: in hell: on inland sea: grieving:
Candid with Leica and grieving: and the image false:

A prodigal engraver drummed across your wilderness,
Caught with care your hands, callous-cored,

Put to paper the pride, the pioneer pate:
I cannot learn that lonesome tune again,

Alliterate that lively grace: its infelicity:
Like music its rapacious faulty grace:

I cannot sing those Farewell Blues it bade
The riverwaters to abide among: know only

A rhythm loses pulse so, strangely,
Heart's rhythm hates it

thus with your guide
You sat attendance at this water's side.

III

Hero on hill: in hell: his goddess grieving:
Candid in bronze and grieving: These
Are my people the great black inland trees:
Cloud-fathers: leeches to rising sun

And who are these: dancers: supple at knee-joint:
Thighs free-swinging: smooth at the buttocks' juncture:
Who in hell are these dancers? Hero, city-child,
Who are these dancers? (man-child, country-boy) who?

Words like incessant: like crescendo: do they mean,
Do they do? The multi-million points of reference
And the Word: polyneuritis in the science-bird:
I give you the Word: *delay is of the essence.*

The hero embattled, the reflex quickened:
The word-innuendo: the word please: I give you
Dancers, goddess, hero on hill: awakened:
Crescendo: the great black inland trees.

Kaw River: Birds

Low river, wastrel, stirless and stale,
  sick with a winter, low water
lean in a death, starveling of shale
  and derelict sedge, you daughter

of flow, sluggard, held in your sand,
  and I who am dumb on your slope:
Oh when is the wind, when is the wind
  of our rain, high water, hope?

Piece on a Birth

Fallen, in that field, in thistle and thorn, mouth
in new cry, hands in new hunger seizing at drouth
in the roots, her heels among stones, in that field
where his feet stood in the sick and forlorn yield

of the land, while thirst and memory galled him, eyes
toward the lost garden, she in brutal labor of thighs
bore the child: they now elated in strange love pain
fear and exile forgot: took hope: and called him Cain.

Birds

Island, green lowland, tongue into river
  and taken by creek, now only tree
and the wind to speak in its clover, feet
  are forgotten, hush keeps its lea,

Wild, lush to ankles: invader, mine plowed
  its sleep, birds woke in cover, lea
hied in startle and cry, meadowlarks upflew,
  tanagers gleamed in the sun to flee

my love, finches and warblers fifed overhead:
  I stood in elation. O swift to flee,
making air a delight: what made I earth? why
  was I fear, who were solace to me?

Piece for a Flyleaf

Gift, be my ghost, grow live in her hand: oh coil
  your roots in her brain: be in her bones: spell her
a name you words that will keep like stones in the roil
  of wars and weather: ride on her tongue: tell her
remember remember remember

Song

Hers is not mine: why must I weep? I am girt
  in my skin: I am island: touch cannot leap
the hollows between: she is only the sea: I will keep
  to my island, what is the sea's moan to me?

Oh, why do I weep? Is voice not of wind, is flesh
  not of water? why is her grief like a wand
to my sleep? what in her far voice fastens a bond
  in my bones? I am island: why do I weep?

NORMAN ROSTEN

Introduction

Continents, moored in the giant planetary seas;
genesis, crucible of order, eras endlessly cooling;
movement and longevity, solstice and equinox,
hemispheres turning towards light and dark;

the miracle of moons, tundra and waterfall,
vanished dinosaur and the sparrow surviving,
tiger and reptile in their conjugal jungles
while a glacier grips a thousand years.

Geologic will separating landmass from water,
the coasts take shape, contour of nations forming
where cities arose out of the vast migrations,
and man built a road toward his outer world.

Seaway and roadway, the carrier,
wheel of the wind which gives power;
as Magellan, following his curved course,
found the earth navigable and round.
Or journey by fixed star, roadless at first,
leading to haven though it be wilderness
and wandering only: as the Israelites
from out of the groin of Egypt, who turned
from Succoth, the leaf shelters, to Etham,
past terror to the region of Baal-Zephon,
and they pitched against Migdol the fortress;
wanderers with no city but a covenant, and
their road became a miracle dividing waters,
and they followed . . .
And road becomes empire,
hub of Babylonia and Tyre, routes of caravan
hardened with mortar, the huge blocks laid down,
touching India, China's great wall, the North,
Rome linked with the savage Alps and Capua!

Seaway and roadway, the carrier;
from most southern point, Cape of the Horn,
where Atlantic and Pacific waters lock
and wash over the spillway of islands,
turn upward, along the spine of Andes,
heaven-ascending hills, the Cordilleras;
where Pizarro (Christ ablaze on his sword!)
hacked a trail through Peru's high ranges
and valleys glowed with the fires of carnage;
pathway to God, the Spaniard bled and died
with *dios* on his lips, *madre de dios* . . .

While northward, Cortes marches like a myth!
Comes from the coast and his road is conquest!
He has passed Cholula, the looting assassin,
towards the Aztec city with golden causeways
and the stone knives waiting, and their breasts
cut open and the hot hearts torn out by hand
and even the great Montezuma learned to die!

Legend and history, doom and rebirth,
the healing comes, the mingling generations;
houses rise on the avenues of slaughter,
hands set stone for the gathering cities
and roads plunging towards eras!

North still by landbridge to Panama,
broadens to enormous plateau, Rio Grande
gouging the rock, follow Sierra Nevada,
teeth of the Rockies, slab upon slab of sky.
And the tide of men towards mist and hills,
echo of wagon and axe stays in the air:
O pioneers coming on, always on,
swarming past valleys, Ohio, Illinois,
makers of expeditions, past Mississippi,
the westering God, there, shines for them,
onward to plains of wheatland and buffalo,
then Pacific roaring through the pines!

Follow the range, the landmass, continuous
to Canada, and the silent Arctic poised
with its vistas: what promise is seen,
planned upon charts more permanent
than coasts, which the engineer alters?

The airman with his longitudinal eyes
confirms both science and the dream;
knows the meeting of the lines of meridian
at some focus, farther than the eye, but proven,
where the center controls all revolving points.

Heron or fauna, the spawning of salmon,
or the giant trajectory of cannon, these move
by laws of mathematics or time, or the one
which Newton famously proved.

So it is that the compass
is lured to its quivering determinate North;
the star becomes mariner's marvelous beacon,
or to squadrons invading the darkness.

See the lightyears at the northern altars!
Constellation of the Dragon, Great Bear crouched,
Polestar, diamond on which the earth turns,
fiery whip of Cepheus curled, Borealis blazing,
star seen at Bethlehem, all pool their light here!

This North, the Polar knowledge and design,
exploration where Man may suddenly discover
he is part of a single Asia, where his cities
look out upon one sea, and it has been so forever.

Here, trackless and ice-rimmed, the silence
surrounded Nansen and Peary, trapped the *Chelyuskin;*
into the white air Sigismund Levanevsky vanished
with his motors toward that same pure path.

Seaway and roadway and paths of air,
meet at this point where construction begins.
However the future is foretold, all fruitful signs,
like bridges, are anchored in land.

Alaska turns, narrows to the strait,
land's end and the land beginning:
ahead, Asia looms, new passage to India,
Cathay's dream towering!

East across frozen Ladoga, west from the Yukon,
the separate events joined by latitude and blood,
roadbuilders smash their final Age of Ice.
He has uprooted the glacier by hand!

He has built a road out of winter and war,
through hunger, fire, and the iron of siege!
He has broken out of wilderness towards love!
He stands before history and his brother!

And all this is known, the records open,
water spanned and the tundras conquered,
winter behind, the guns in canvas,
and children with wonder on their faces,
smiling . . .
                    asking us . . .

(*This is the opening section of a work in progress dealing with the Alcan Highway and the vision of roads linking the Americas with the continents of Asia and Europe.*)

LANGSTON HUGHES

Madam and the Minister

Rev. Butler came by
My house last week.
He said, Have you got
A little time to speak?

He said, I am interested
In your soul.
Has it been saved,
Or is your heart stone-cold?

I said, Reverend,
I'll have you know
I was baptized
Long ago.

He said, What have you
Done since then?
I said, None of your
Business, friend.

He said, Sister,
Have you back-slid?
I said, It felt good—
If I did!

He said, Sister,
Come time to die,
The Lord will surely
Ask you why!
I'm gonna pray
For you! Goodbye!

I felt kinder sorry
I'd talked that way
After Rev. Butler
Went away—
So I ain't in no mood
For sin today.

Madam and Her Might-Have-Been

I had two husbands.
I could of had three—
But my Might-Have-Been
Was too good for me.

When you grow up the hard way
Sometimes you don't know
What's too good to be true
Just might be so.

He worked all the time,
Spent money on me.
First time in my life
I had anything free.

I said, Do you love me,
Or am I mistaken?
You're always giving
And never taking.

He said, Madam, I swear
All I want is *you*.
Right then and there
I knowed we was through!

I told him, Jackson,
You better leave—
You surely got some'n else
Up your sleeve.

When you think you got bread
It's always a stone—
Nobody loves nobody
For yourself alone.

He said, In me
You've got no trust.
I said, I don't want
My heart to bust.

Madam and the Wrong Visitor

A man knocked three times.
Never seen him before.
He said, Are you Madam?
I said, What's the score?

He said, I reckon
You don't know my name,
But I've come to call
On you just the same.

I stepped back
Like he had a charm.
He said, I really
Don't mean no harm.

I'm just Old Death
And I thought I might
Pay you a visit
Before night.

He said, You're Johnson—
Madam Alberta K.?
I said, Yes—but Alberta
Ain't goin' with you today!

No sooner had I told him
Than I awoke.
The doctor said, Madam,
Your fever's broke—

Nurse, put her on a diet,
And buy her a chicken.
I said, Better buy two—
'Cause I'm still here kickin'.

SAUL GOTTLIEB

Man with His Head Between His Hands

A mourning figure walks, and will not rest—Vachel Lindsay.

American in khaki silhouetted on the shore
stops   slings off rifle   helmet   mask
turns westward where the green golden sun
sinks softly into Africa   breathes deeply
of evening air   then sits among rock shadows.

The beaches are a place to go alone   to think
to rest   to clean the gun   :   dead gulls' skeletons lie
bulbous red sea-plants tangle   and a mile or so away
the hull of a torn battleship   black against the lowering hour.

Solitude brings peace   then why the ache again
why the fingers reaching   reaching
we've taken Tunis   felt our strength   then why
inside thickening morbid hope   blood-let
uneasy   mutable as the welkin sky?

Running into the surf off the barge at Oran
banging his carbine like a kid with a popgun
Danny had yelled   :   Another year boys   and home!
and a moment later he was home   with the quick smile
yet smiling   the same glad eyes toward French forts
brown sand filling his mouth

It had been a misunderstanding   vous voyez
French generals brought desert flowers to Danny
Americans came with roses

death is a misunderstanding

Five months and this bastard stretch of world
is ours   to have and to hold   to cherish
till death do us . . . .

Oh so let us sing a psalm now
twang the drums   fuchsia throats
hear sweet trumpets   sweet and hot
for in a year   boys   in a year   boys
and glory   boys   glory   glory   glory

boys   Danny-boy   glory   Danny-boy

and home   Danny-boy   there the fight's begun
in wakened eyes clearing roads for combat
traffic teems anxious from city to city
works' tempo molds friable thought

How long   how long   always
in battle   here as there   the earth's face
small with transmitted shouts   photronic
guts at thirty thousand feet   how long
to the dream   how long
to the promises?

That Arab at Maknassi saying   :
there are no sudden Christs—
Allah is a tree unborn in winter
hearts   waiting like lovers for spring

and the last letter coming   :
please don't fret darling   kill
not murder   don't fret there
in the desert   kiss me oh kiss me

There are wise counsels in firm white teeth
gleaming from pink gums   through brimming lips
this music stills the voiceless pain inside
quieter rhythms issue   ebb   flow   life
comes in a conch-shell.

Yes!   there are no sudden Christs—
Christmas is an earth-wide airway
hidden   undiscovered

but it is there

and thus shall we mourn   unrestive
in pagan rejoice
for ever

American in khaki silhouetted on the shore
rises   loads clip in gun   picks up helmet   mask
turns eastward where the armies move
and first stars shine softly over Europe
then walks northward   among rock shadows.

IRWIN STARK

Detroit: June 1943

Deep in us still the fury of our seed
cracked in a dry season and exposed.
Note how the rootless bottom lands erode,
the parched wind tempted and unappeased.
Better the sun to blanch the open pith
than black earth hide, the harvest gather in
too late to winnow. Better the burning wrath
even in act than death from a slow poison.
Deep in us still the gnarled and stolid tree.
The bigot stock, the stake, the gun, the rope,
feeding our hungered passions, mark us and betray
the sower. Deep in the cankered crop we reap,
deep in the muddy trenches of our minds,
deep in us still the enemy commands.

PAUL ALEXANDER BARTLETT

Mountain Village

This is the village I have sought
where mountain peace is given out
with barefoot sound on cobbled street
and call of birds. The barefoot scene
is tiled, is red and white; it's like
a boy, it's like a girl, is height
of pine smell. Here the world is grass
where cobbles lie, is speech where grapes
grow. And it's free, this peace of place,
it's like a cloud that knows a way
and like a rock that sees the wild
weather and will not let it by.
It's village but its peace is share,
share barefoot basket in your hand,

share fountain where the burros stop,
share flowers beside the mossy pond.
The barefoot place fits closest, gives
your mind the time to sift down in;
it fits your hand, your eyes, your ears;
it fits the pine floors' piney creak.
Notice how large the barefoot sky,
notice how long the barefoot rain;
the barefoot boy comes with his lake
of lilies, and violets his eyes.
This is the village I have sought,
where mountain peace is barefoot caught.

NORMAN MACLEOD

The Rock, the Man and the Mountain

The rock my heel edged from the mountain's flank
Rose slowly like a white spring from the earth,
Fell forward into silence, sank, and ripped its red way
From bank to stone gulley, boulder and creek,
Caroming with increased violence cheek to cheek.

And I felt misfortune run blue in my breath,
Find outlet and tangible outline in front of my face
And fall—even as its original object went
From heaven, from place, and whose arrested descent
I had disturbed and nevertheless continued
Roughly, just as the mountain's meaning shifted
Because of accident and axis of my presence
Whose world revolved within an arbitrary range,
Knew the estranged sun and, yet, remained
Open as I was, still with blame, and moving
Strangely directed and stubbornly forward
In balanced strength, on lean excited lung,
Heart completely and my mind unstrung—

Until that rock strike solid into earth
Disintegrating the fine grave of its valley
And I take up once more from where I left,
Seeking my own deflected change and death.

HENRY STONE

Let the Sun Pour In

When I got out of the elevator on the sixth floor, I wasn't sure just which apartment I was looking for. And I didn't care very much. It seemed to me that whichever bell I rang, it would probably come to the same thing—and I didn't care about the thing. I had just been for a long walk, and I had thought out a number of different plans. And when I was about to ring the bell, I was sick and tired of people. But then I was sick and tired of myself, especially after a long walk when I had thought out a number of different plans. And I didn't know which I was more sick and tired of. Myself was one thing. My objection to people was their faces.

Everyone I know has a face. And I hate faces. I keep finding them turning up in front of me everywhere. I have never yet walked into a room with a crowd of people in it, that I haven't seen faces and faces. And I hate them. And everybody I know has a face.

And so I stopped before I rang, and thought for a while. Most of what I thought about was what I was looking for. And that may require a little explanation.

My name is Allan Gray. Somewhere in this world there is a room with ten people in it. Some day I shall find the room and knock on the door. Come in, will be said, and I shall go inside and there shall be ten people sitting there. Hello, Allan, where have you been so long, sit down. And I shall sigh with relief and sit down. At first I will sit quiet and listen to the talk. And it will not be brilliant talk, and not quick talk, and not smart talk. It will be warm talk, and I shall like it and like to listen to it. Then I shall talk and they will talk and we will talk, and it will be warm talk. Slowly there will be taken from the top of my head the Rocky Mountains, the Alps and the Pyrenees. And after a good bit of talk, I shall probably be able to hold my head up. This is what I have been looking for, and I keep looking for it, especially on the long walks I take. The walks do get longer and longer, and I don't often find myself outside an apartment on the sixth floor, wondering which bell to ring.

I did it once, but it did something to me, and so I don't do it any more. Once I did it a lot. Now I take long walks and work out plans. This is because my sleep method failed. I had rung so many bells, and sat down so often with people with faces, that I had to work out a method which I used to call my sleep method. I could sit in a room and talk, cold talk, and about ten o'clock, if it were in the evening, I would go to sleep, but no one knew I was asleep. I would talk and keep my eyes open and move around, and everyone thought I was awake. They would talk to me and I would answer. And I would talk to them and they would answer. And then about one o'clock I would wake up. Everybody always was tired because they had been awake, but I had been asleep, and so I felt wide-awake. This I did very often, and in those days I used to get a lot of sleep. Now I don't, because I keep walking and I don't often go to see people. My sleep method failed, although I don't know why. I would go to sleep and not wake up. Or I would wake up and not go to sleep, and anyway it failed.

Two weeks ago I went to see someone, and he, or he and she, and probably they, must have known me when I was. Because they said hello Allan, why don't you come in. Sit down. But when they asked me what I wanted to do, I said I wanted to take a bath. I went inside to the bathroom and locked the door and let the water run. When the tub was full—I like a hot tub and it must be filled—I got into it and sat there for an hour. I know it was an hour because when I went into the room again, they said I had been in the tub an hour. I said goodbye, and went out, and haven't seen them since. They were nice people with faces, but I should be sad if I were any one of them. They were nice to me and said goodbye Allan, come again, but I don't think they meant it. I am not going to see them again because it wouldn't pay someone like me to see them. He was all right when he was younger, but he must have changed, and that's what happens.

So I was standing in front of the apartment, and I rang the bell. The maid opened the door and took my hat. I had no coat because it was summer and I love the summer. Once I was walking along the street, and two little girls were in a car. They were laughing and giggling, and when I went by, one stuck her head out of the window and said I love you Mister. I love you too, I said, and I went on walking. That doesn't happen in the winter.

I went inside and there was a room filled with people and faces. I wouldn't say hello, but there was a baby in the room, a little baby in a cradle, wide awake, and I went over to him. I sat down and we had a long, long talk. When I think of how long it took me to learn to talk to babies, or rather, that they could talk, it makes me feel stupid. Now I know that I can talk to a baby about anything at all, especially boy babies, and the baby will always understand. I talked to this baby for about two hours and told him a number of things. Then I listened for a little while. And he did know what I was talking about. Of course, he couldn't solve my problem, but he did understand it. And I think that is a great deal.

Every time I see fools talking the way they do to babies, I get angry. Babies don't know everything, but they almost do, and they know how to tell you what they know. I sometimes think that if I had spoken to a baby soon enough, it might have been different, that is, I might have been a different Allan Gray. I'll tell you a little later about that Allan Gray I might have been. My only point now is that perhaps a baby might have been able to tell me what to do. Whether I would have been better, I don't know, but probably, and those are the things you can't be sure of. Take my advice: always talk to a baby, and if you keep at it the way I did, you may get to be able to understand what they say. It does take perseverance, but so does everything. My sleep method didn't work at first, but after a while it was wonderful. Of course, it did fail, but I guess it had to.

When I was through with the baby, they gave me something to eat, and I ate it and said, thank you, excuse me please from the table. Then I left, and on the way out started to think about a number of plans, and about how little boys and girls sometimes talk when they're alone.

That's something that always puzzled me, and so maybe it's a good thing to tell you a story about a little boy and girl. It is called "Lion in the Cage," and this is the point of it: Little boys and girls are always told their mother is the most beautiful woman in the world. But as they grow older, they begin to wonder—of course, it generally isn't true—and sometimes they find out the truth by what I should not call truth-provocative incidents. This story calls for understanding and sympathy, and I am going to write it out, and see if you can understand it:

LION IN THE CAGE

DONALD (six): Do you think Mother is the most beautiful woman in the world?

ELSIE: (four and one-half): 'Course she is. Why?

DONALD: I was looking out the window the other day, and I thought I saw Mother coming down the street, but when she got closer, I saw it wasn't Mother, but another lady. And she was awfully beautiful.

ELSIE: But not as beautiful as Mother.

DONALD (somewhat irritated): I didn't say she was, but she was awfully beautiful, and maybe . . .

ELSIE: I think you're stupid. Let's play "Lion in the Cage."

DONALD: No, I want to think for a little while. I can't always be playing with you.

ELSIE: All right for you. Whenever you want to play "Lion in the Cage," I always play with you.

DONALD: That's different. You're a girl.

ELSIE: All right for you—I'll get even on you.

DONALD: You've got no right to say that. I didn't do anything to you.

ELSIE: You did so. I want to play and you want to think, and then you say I'm only a girl.

DONALD: Aw, you don't understand. Sometimes you've got to think about things. You will too, when you're as old as I am.

ELSIE: All right, if you won't play, never mind.

(Elsie goes over to her toy piano and starts banging the keys and humming)

DONALD: Please stop that, Elsie.

ELSIE: No.

DONALD: Please . . .

ELSIE: Why should I?

DONALD: 'Cause I'm asking you to.

ELSIE: Well, I asked you to play "Lion in the Cage" and you wouldn't.

DONALD: That's different. Please stop banging on the piano and let me think.

ELSIE: No, I won't. I can bang on the piano if I want to.

DONALD: I'll tell Mother when she comes in.

ELSIE: And I'll tell her that you said she wasn't the most beautiful woman in the world.

DONALD: I didn't say that.

ELSIE: You did so.

DONALD: I did not!

ELSIE: Did! Did!

DONALD: Elsie, please don't say that. I do think Mother is the most beautiful woman in the world.

ELSIE: And will you play "Lion in the Cage" now?
DONALD: All right . . . I'll play.

I like this and I think it has a number of significant features to it. You know, about the difference between men and women, even at an early age, and a lot of other things, and it doesn't take up too much space.

I sometimes wonder whether I am taking up too much space. My face does—I have a face—but now I am only thinking of space on paper.

Once I was afraid of writing all this because I was afraid that I would sit down and write for six months or eight years, and then they would come—I would have gone down and taken a boat—and they would look at all my manuscripts: "Why, this is all illegible, there's nothing here but scrawls." So I was afraid, but now I am not afraid, because I know what comes after and before.

I said before that things might have been different, and I often think they would have been. Of course, this may be only a matter of opinion, but there would be no point in resting with a statement like this. Either there is a difference, or there is not. And though there may be nothing, we don't live as though there were.

One of the things that might have mattered a great deal was my lawsuit. If that had only been attended to more vigorously, I really think I would know more today. And I don't think the trouble was with the lawyers. You may have heard of them: USQUEBAUGH, PINCHOIX AND LANIANTI. An excellent firm. Usquebaugh was the business-getter, Pinchoix was the business-getter, Lanianti was the business-getter. Their office was a tree in Van Cortlandt Park. I spent many an enjoyable day there, and met a number of very fine people. They had no clerks but many clients. They handled all sorts of different matters and, as I understood it, enjoyed in their own locality a reputation for the highest integrity and ability.

I had been recommended to them by no one I knew but he seemed to be a sound man with proper views, and I never regretted taking his advice. Usquebaugh, Pinchoix and Lanianti became not only my lawyers but my friends, my advisers and my intimates. Most of the time I spent with them, we didn't discuss my case, but talked of things at large. I won't bore you with repeating our discussions, but I think I can assure each of you that they were most interesting and vital.

The action itself had been planned by me for some time. Some state that I had thought of it as a baby. This I don't believe because if you place any faith in time—six minutes after twelve—11:45—half-past six—then you must see why I can't think of it till much later.

I wrote the complaint myself, and I am going to set it forth below:

SUPREME COURT: NEW YORK COUNTY x

ALLAN GRAY, Plaintiff,

—against—

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZARTAN

Defendant.

x

The plaintiff above named, by USQUEBAUGH, PINCHOIX AND LANIANTI, his attorneys, as and for his complaint herein respectfully shows to the Court and alleges:

FIRST: Upon information and belief that the defendant, THE UNIVERSITY OF ZARTAN, is and was at all times hereinafter mentioned, a joint stock corporation, organized under, and existing by virtue of the laws of the State of Zartan.

SECOND: That on or about the 15th day of June, 1927, the plaintiff was a graduate of a first-class high school in the Borough of Manhattan, City and State of New York.

THIRD: That at about that time, and for some time prior thereto, the defendant was engaged in an extensive campaign to persuade graduates of high schools to matriculate at the UNIVERSITY OF ZARTAN.

FOURTH: That in pursuance of said plan, and to induce the plaintiff to matriculate at the UNIVERSITY OF ZARTAN and to pay tuition fees, the defendant represented that if the plaintiff would matriculate at the UNIVERSITY OF ZARTAN and would pursue a course of studies there until graduation in June 1931:

(a) The plaintiff would receive a college education;

(b) The plaintiff would pursue a course of studies in company with others desirous of securing a college education;

(c) The plaintiff would find, during his four-year course, continual intellectual and spiritual stimulation;

(d) The plaintiff would find professors and instructors eager and anxious to help him pursue various studies and improve his intellectual capacity, and that the said professors and instructors were capable of so doing;

(e) The plaintiff would find his intellectual curiosity stimulated and would have continual intellectual guidance;

(f) The plaintiff would graduate in June 1931 with a cultured, well-rounded background of history, literature, economics, philosophy, sociology, foreign languages, mathematics and art.

FIFTH: That at the time of the making of these representations, the defendant well knew, or by the exercise of reasonable care should have known, that these statements were untrue and false and had no foundation in fact.

SIXTH: That relying on said statements, the plaintiff was induced to, and did, matriculate at the UNIVERSITY OF ZARTAN and remained there until June 1931, and received an A. B. degree at that time.

SEVENTH: That the aforesaid representations and each of them were untrue and false and that:

(a) The plaintiff did not receive a college education;

(b) The plaintiff did not pursue a course of studies in company with others desirous of securing a college education;

(c) The plaintiff did not find, during his four-year course, continual intellectual and spiritual stimulation;

(d) The plaintiff did not find professors and instructors eager and anxious to help him pursue various studies and improve his intellectual capacity and that the said professors and instructors were not capable of so doing;

(e) The plaintiff did not find his intellectual curiosity stimulated and did not have continual intellectual guidance;

(f) The plaintiff did not graduate in June 1931 with a cultured, well-rounded background of history, literature, economics, philosophy, sociology, foreign languages, mathematics and art.

EIGHTH: That the plaintiff has by reason of the foregoing suffered damages in the sum of $241,000.

WHEREFORE, plaintiff demands judgment against the defendant for the sum of TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY-ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS ($241,000), together with the costs and disbursements of this action.

Yours, etc.
USQUEBAUGH, PINCHOIX & LANIANTI
Attorneys for Plaintiff
Office & P.O. Address
2 Van Cortlandt Park
Borough of Bronx
New York City

I think it is a good complaint, and there is no reason at all why it should have suffered the ill fate it did. The whole idea was mine, and I still like it. If each of my brothers had sued his university for the same amount—and confidentially, I think they are entitled to greater damages—one went to Yale, some went to Princeton—the whole family would have been better off. I have seven brothers and a penny. 241,000 times seven brothers and a penny—or bigger damages as I have said—would have been nice.

Talking of my brothers reminds me of how, when we were all little, we used to look up to fat people. Fat was everything to us. Oh, to be fat. If a fat person came into our house, we would reverence him. He, or she—there are fat women too—could have the biggest chair and best place at the table and everything nice. And some people we knew were fat and rich. This, of course, is all anyone can wish for. I don't know whether we inherited our awe for fat or were taught it when we were young. It was the only religion we ever had, and I still think it was the best. Oh, to be fat . . . oh, oh, to be fat and rich. . . .

There was no trouble at first with my action. I wrote out the complaint and called upon USQUEBAUGH, PINCHOIX & LANIANTI. First I had a long talk with Usquebaugh. Then I went down one bough and had a long talk with Pinchoix. Then I came back several days later, and had a long talk with Lanianti. Then I had a long talk with Usquebaugh and Pinchoix. Then with Usquebaugh and Lanianti. Then with Pinchoix and Lanianti. Then everything looked fine and I sat down to a long, long conference with Usquebaugh, Pinchoix and Lanianti. Gentlemen they were, each one of them. The last talk was figured on the basis of determining the difference between my talk with Usquebaugh and my talk with Usquebaugh and Pinchoix, and then multiplying by 2½. Lanianti might have objected to this, but of course he didn't. He wasn't that type of man at all.

This last talk was very satisfactory, and when it was all through, we shook hands, and it was decided that I should have five more talks, one with Usquebaugh, one with Pinchoix, one with Lanianti, one with Usquebaugh and Pinchoix and one with Usquebaugh and Lanianti. Pinchoix and Lanianti were no longer talking. Starting some time soon, I did that, and it was confidentially decided to go ahead. The complaint wasn't to be changed at all. I went for a long walk that night, feeling nice. Tomorrow is the day.

Then it went wrong. Then came woe. Late the next month, I went back to the tree. Usquebaugh, I called. Pinchoix, I called. Lanianti, I called. No answer. I was worried. Where were they? I called and called. No answer. They had moved, and left no address. I went to every other tree in the park in vain.

I couldn't find them. My case was gone. My complaint was gone. All I had left was seven brothers and a penny, and I can't use them. I still keep looking for USQUEBAUGH, PINCHOIX AND LANIANTI, but I don't think I'll ever find them. And I am more anxious to find the room with ten people. That's what I really want to do. I did think that if my case had gone well, that might have helped me to find the room, but even without it, I'll do it. You see, I have to.

Some people say that one of the reasons I have to is because of women. I don't think that is so. I do appreciate what this world owes to women, and I owe a great deal to women. I have six sisters and I could do without them, but I do realize that if you keep writing and writing—and this is not unintelligible, if it were unintelligible, it would be—then you have to write something about women, and I am willing. I am going to write about a woman whose name I don't know, and whom I never met. Her name was not Megan. I sometimes think that if it had been, that might have made a difference too. At any rate, here is what I write about women. Or it may be about a woman. I don't know if it is always fair to say women if you mean woman, or woman when you mean women. This may not matter now, but sometimes it does. It has in the past, and will.

AN EVENING

The maid answered the bell and took his hat. He walked into the living room, lit a cigarette and sat down.

"Just which bitch do I have a date with tonight?" he thought.

Then he said it out loud, but so softly that no one outside of the room could hear. He repeated it again, but this time a little more loudly, enjoying the sound of it.

As he finished, Elsie came into the room. She wore a simple white dress, with a blue scarf casually draped around her neck. She is pretty, he thought, as he stood up and exchanged greetings with her.

They sat down, she on the couch and he on a chair by the window. She asked about his work, and how he was getting on. His answers were brief and he turned the conversation to her activities. They included no more than is usually embraced in the life of a daughter of a well-to-do family: a little social work, a little shopping, a few books interspersed here and there, social engagements in the evening; and a sum total of her activities was complete.

The conversation grew wearisome to him. Both of them were now sitting on the couch, and he drew her closer. She responded readily and the next half-hour was spent in mild caressing. This also grew tiresome.

"Like to go to a movie?" he asked.

"If you'd like to, but I was at one this afternoon."

"Take a walk?"

"Don't you think it's too hot?"

"Sit home?"

"For a while anyway. Perhaps we'll go out to eat later."

He accepted her verdict. But they couldn't spend the evening talking. He drew her to him again. Now they were lying side by side on the couch.

"The bed inside is more comfortable, dear," she said.

"But your people . . ."

"They won't be home until late."

They walked inside to the spare bedroom. She lay down and looked up to him smiling. He lay down by her side. An hour passed.

"But you still want to be a virgin."

"I am young yet, dear, and it means so little to you."

"As you say. You know what I think. It would be good for you."

"I'll wait a while longer. Then, if I'm not married . . ."

"You will be—and probably to someone damn nice. Let me pass on him first."

She sat up sharply, and he could see that she was trying to hide that irritated look he so often provoked. He hadn't meant to hurt her, but invariably if they talked long enough, he did. He knew that whenever he offered these occasional sops to his conscience, it was like a slap in the face to her. But this much he thought he owed to himself. This, he thought, meant he was playing the game squarely.

She stood up and walked to the window trying to control herself. He appreciated her efforts to avoid one of their frequent quarrels, but there was nothing for him to say. Finally, she turned towards him:

"Let's go out."

They put on their hats without exchanging a word. A taxi speedily took them to the grill of a large hotel. And they danced and talked of inconsequential things. At the late hour when they arrived at her home, she said good night to him quietly at the door.

His hand trembled the next morning when he read in the newspaper that she had jumped or fallen from her window at 5:30 that morning.

"C" comes after "b" and that is why I am writing "c" now. As a matter of fact, I could very reasonably go back through "b" and write "a+" or "b—," or I could go straight to "a" and then stop, or start just before "b" and a letter after "a." But I know that "c" comes after "b."

I think I know it because of the long years that I worked in a counting house. Day after day, and very many nights, I used to work, and it was very hard work. My job was to count. I would get down very early in the morning, and start to count, and sometimes I didn't leave until very late. I was a good counter, and everybody was very nice to me there. That is, everybody but one small man with one eye, and he was not very nice to me.

I remember the day that I counted up to one million. We had a big party with nothing to eat, and nothing to drink and no music. And I was the first one in the counting house to count to one million. After I had done it, several of the other young men did it, but that didn't get them any parties. The little man with one eye said I shouldn't have had a party either, and I said I should have had, and he left the subject there.

But I got tired of the work, and took my hat off the rack, and went out for a long walk, and haven't been back since. I am not going back. Almost the one thing I do know is that I should not work in a counting house. Let others work in counting houses. I am not very selfish, but I will not do work like that. It was bad for me.

Sometimes I think that is why I became the Allan Gray I am. I can say I could have been another Allan Gray, and maybe I was once. There are or were, or could have been two Allan Grays. Now I am Allan Gray-on-a-different-track. But I might have been Allan Gray-off-the-track. So I am going to show what Allan Gray-off-the-track was, or could have been. This makes a difference, and it is important:

Betty turned from the edge of the steep cliff and was startled to find that she was not alone. A tall young man, clad in white slacks and a sweater, was looking at her and smiling, but not as though he expected her to smile back or greet him in any way. But her curiosity was too aroused for her to walk away calmly.

"May I ask why you smile?" she said.

"I was trying to decide whether or not to push you off, and just when I had about made up my mind, you turned around."

"Are you serious?"

"That's something else I can't decide, but let's forget about it. May I walk you back to the hotel?"

It was on the walk back that she succeeded in placing him in her memory. She had been sitting on the hotel porch with her parents when he had driven up two days ago. At a summer resort, each newcomer, and particularly each male, is subjected to an initial close scrutiny. Generally, at least one person in the hotel knows or knows of the new guest, but he had been an exception to the rule. There was no one who could claim acquaintance with him, and he seemed well satisfied with such a state of affairs.

Immediately after registering, he had gone to his room, and had not appeared until dinner time. Then, well-dressed in white flannels and brown coat, he had walked through the length of the dining-room to the solitary table assigned to him, as though unconscious that there were others in the room. Some hotels make an effort to seat single young men with other unaccompanied guests, but he had stated his desire to sit alone.

After his meal, and still the cynosure of all eyes, he had walked away from the hotel and on to the golf course nearby. Then he had disappeared into the dark, and it wasn't until the grill (where the young people danced away their evenings) opened that he had reappeared and gone to his room. This had been his routine for the two days since his arrival—solitary meals and walks by himself daytime and night-time.

Naturally, conduct such as this elicited comment. A young man was supposed to make himself agreeable at a summer resort. If he didn't care for dancing and the company of girls, he should be athletic. If not athletic, he might at least play bridge or join one of the groups on the porch that spent the afternoon in talk. But Allan Gray—the desk clerk had tired of informing the other guests of his name—did none of the usual things. His routine seemed unvaried.

In fact, as Betty thought to herself on the walk to the hotel, this was probably the first time he had done more than exchange a casual good morning or good night with any of the other guests.

And she felt a little triumphant that it had been she who was the first to get him really to seem normal. Not that it was very normal for his first words to be concerned with pushing her off a cliff, but at least it was better than nothing. Allan Gray was attractive, if not actually good-looking, and she would really have walked exultantly into the view of the crowded porch, had not his conversation been so odd.

She heard what he was saying, but she was sure that she couldn't understand what he was getting at. He had asked her a dozen questions and hadn't waited for a single answer. The questions had ranged from her belief in spiritualism to whether she thought he ought to eat more vegetables. When he wasn't interrogating her, he was reciting some poetry which she had never heard and telling her how good it was. But even the poetry he had interrupted to ask her whether she thought clothes make the man. So continuous was his stream of talk that by the time they reached the porch, she hadn't really had a chance to tell him her name, much less respond to anything he said.

They paused for a minute on the porch steps and just as she was about to introduce him to the people seated closest to them, he politely excused himself and went to his room.

Betty was immediately besieged on all sides. What was he like? What had he said? How did she happen to be with him? Betty found no time to, and in fact, couldn't, answer the questions hastily propounded. She satisfied politeness by stating that he seemed very nice and that she had met him out walking. The sound of the dinner bell rescued her from more questions, and she entered the dining-room with her mother and father.

Allan Gray came in a few minutes later, but did not glance at her table which was situated at one side of the room. However, immediately after lunch, he approached her on the porch, and asked her if she would care to play golf with him. When she assented, he told her he would see her at the first tee at 2:30 and walked away.

She met him on the first tee and they drove off. Halfway down the fairway, Betty turned to him to comment on the excellence of his drive. He beckoned her to him, and said quietly but firmly: "Please be quiet." As they had reached the spot where her ball lay, Betty covered her confusion by calling her caddy and selecting her club. She dubbed several shots before she managed even to think of what she was doing. Gray stood beside her, whistling calmly. Finally the ball rose and sailed down the fairway. They moved on together.

The rest of the match was played in quiet. One of the caddies also received the admonitory "Please be quiet," and not another word was exchanged among the four of them.

Betty breathed a sigh of relief when they reached the 18th green. Her score had totaled 125, whereas she had gone around the previous day in 98, which was a little better than her average. Allan had effortlessly secured an 83.

He paid both of the caddies, dismissing them with a nod, and he and Betty started to walk back to the hotel. She was determined not to speak and he had apparently reached the same silence without determination. They paused for a moment on the hotel steps and Allan said: "You certainly don't play a good game of golf."

"Do you think any girl could, going around with you?"

"I don't know. That has been a minor problem in my life. But, unfortunately, the major problems absorb my attention. Perhaps we'll play again some time."

Before she could deliver her retort, he was gone up the steps and into the hotel. She felt deserted and a little weak with anger and surprise. She was thankful that the porch was having one of its deserted moments and sank into a wicker chair for a few moments' rest. Later on, under the shower, she decided that whatever Allan Gray asked her to do next, would be politely but firmly refused.

However, her determination left her when she was seated in the grill that night with a group of the other young people at the hotel. For the first time since his arrival, Allan Gray appeared in the grill. He stood at the entrance and looked around calmly, but intently. His eyes met Betty's though she had tried to avoid them, but his bland stare of non-recognition stopped the half-smile she had summoned. Finally, he walked to an unoccupied table in the corner, sat down and ordered a drink. He sat this way for some time, and Betty concluded that it was not an invitation to dance that she would have to refuse.

However, in the midst of a dance, she saw someone tap her partner on the shoulder. "May I?" said Allan. Her escort stepped aside and they danced. He was an excellent dancer, and Betty was sorry when the music came to a close.

"Dancing is hell," said Allan quietly, as he led her back to her table, nodded politely to the others seated there, and walked across the grill floor and out into the air.

"He certainly must have fallen for you," a girl at Betty's table exclaimed, "walking, golfing and now dancing."

Betty made no answer, asked for a drink and cigarette, and managed to parry further questions until the music was resumed. Then she accepted the first offer to dance and no one at the table noted her confusion. The man must be insane, she thought, and glanced towards the window nearest the door where he had made his exit. He was standing there, fixing his eyes on her, and mutely articulating in an unmistakable manner "the man must be insane."

Betty stumbled on the floor, and her partner looked down with a quick note of inquiry. "It's nothing," she said, "there must be an uneven board in the floor." The dance ended and she was escorted back to her seat. Try as she might, she could not keep her eyes from the window, but he was gone, and she sighed with relief. The thing was becoming uncanny. Either he was a madman, or she was being driven out of her mind.

And yet, she didn't like to talk it over with the others. It all sounded too foolish and possibly was a reflection on her, in some odd way.

The evening ended without another sight of Allan Gray, but Betty woke the next morning with a foreboding that she could not account for at first. Momentarily she groped to find what it was that was depressing her, and then the thought of Gray came back.

The man's antics were wearing her down, she thought, and resolved to spend the day in her room. She pleaded some excuse about a headache to her mother, and had her breakfast sent up with the morning paper. She had just finished eating when there was a knock at the door. Her permission to enter disclosed a bellboy carrying a telegram. She dismissed him and opened it, wondering which of her friends in the city was engaged or had had a baby. But the message wasn't more than five words, and was sent from a town two miles away, and read: DO YOU REALLY LIKE CANOEING. It was signed, ALLAN GRAY.

This is too much, Betty exclaimed to herself. She re-read the telegram several times, and at the conclusion of each reading started to tear it up. But the thing fascinated her. She finally decided that lying in bed was no solution for her problems. She was not going to let anyone keep her in her room on a beautiful morning. She dressed slowly, rereading the telegram and descended to the porch. And there she was caught up in a circle of animated gossip, and the morning went by. By lunchtime the thought of Allan Gray had receded to the dim recesses of her mind, and when her mother and father came back from their daily walk, she joined them for lunch. There was no sign of Allan Gray in the dining-room and lunch passed uneventfully.

After lunch came the usual rest period on the porch, but to Betty it was not so restful. In spite of herself, she found she was continually looking for Allan and that she couldn't pay attention even to the trivial conversation that was surrounding her.

This may or may not be altogether understandable. Allan Gray-off-the-track. But it probably was not only the counting house. It was so many different things. One of the most important was the faces. They kept coming after me. I got on a trolley-car once—I never get on them any more—the conductor had a face, the passengers had faces, the little boy who hung on the back of the car had a face—only I had no face—or at least I couldn't see it.

If this is what made the difference, can anyone blame me?

d.

When I go for walks, I always walk in the city. And there is no one in the whole city but myself. I walk downtown, and in and out of buildings. There is no one there. I walk through streets and streets. I take the subway uptown and downtown. There is no one in the city but myself. And it is not an ancient city, and it is not a deserted city. It is this city, and there is no one in it but me. That is, as long as I keep my head turned to the right.

As soon as I turn my head to the left or straight ahead, there are millions of people. They rush by me in thousands, hurrying, yelling and screaming. I stand near a subway and hordes of them pour out of the trains and hordes of them run. I walk downtown and the streets are filled with people. People everywhere. And they don't know me and I don't know them. Once I joined a group of them and rushed down the street. We ran and we ran, and then we turned back and we ran and we ran. Then they separated and there was no one there but me. Then some more came and began to run down the street. But I didn't go with them.

Nowadays, I generally keep my head turned to the right. I don't want to see all these people.

Sometimes I try to walk to the country, but I have only been able to get there once. The other times I walk and I walk and there is a lot of city behind me and far ahead I can see the country. And I walk and walk and suddenly there is more city ahead of me. Just when it looks as though I am getting to the country, streets spring up and buildings spring up and the streets stretch out for miles and miles, and I get so tired walking. Of course, if I keep my head turned to the right, there are no people in these streets, but once I forgot, and all of a sudden there were millions of people. They ran down the streets and ran back up the streets and in and out of the buildings and they screamed. I was scared, but I turned my head to the right and then there were no more people. If I couldn't do this, I don't know what would happen. Once I did get to the country, but it was a beach, and I was so happy. I lay on the beach and the sun beat down on my body, and it did the same to a lot of other people on the beach, and it was nice.

And then I tried my plan and it worked. I unscrewed the top of my head and let the sun pour in. It was wonderful. It did to my head what it had done to my body. The warm beams shone into my head and healed the insides. The barbed wire began to go. The broken glass disappeared and all the clouds of smoke began to give way to life. The fibers began to knit and my head began to feel warm inside. The other people on the beach saw me and they started to do the same thing with their heads. The warm rays poured into all the heads and it grew quiet and peaceful and warm. And I slept.

Then I woke suddenly. The sun was gone. The rain was coming down and coming into my head. I could hear the broken glass and the barbed wire and I screwed on the top of my head quickly and I ran away. Everybody was running away, but I ran faster and faster and there was no one with me. I ran through the country and it was still country and then it became the city. When I looked back there was all city behind me and no country.

But I knew I had been in the country, because I had smelled the air and it was a smell I remembered from years ago in France. And France meant Elissa Sigourney. And whenever I smelled that smell, it made me think of France. This is what I thought of:

When I was ten, I was in France with my Mother. The War was on and Mother and I had been traveling through a portion of the country near the front lines. There was some mix-up and we became separated. Mother's train proceeded to Paris and I was left where a regiment of soldiers had been quartered. Naturally, being a boy of ten, I became the pet of the regiment and I remember it as a delightful time. That is, it was delightful, until the arrival of Elissa Sigourney and the events that took place then.

Of course at the age of ten, I didn't quite realize everything that was happening, but I was an intelligent boy and when one of the soldiers told me that a spy had been captured and was being brought to our camp, I knew what that meant. I also realized a little of what the sergeant told me about Elissa Sigourney and what she had been doing.

Elissa Sigourney was the daughter of one of the noble families of a Balkan state. Some hundred years before, her family had been deposed by the British Government, and since that time, though it claimed the right to rule, it had been superseded by a family of less ancient and distinguished lineage. The entire family had sworn undying vengeance against the British, and when the War broke out, Elissa Sigourney enlisted all her efforts against the Allied cause.

She was eighteen at the time, and as fair a creature as ever lived. For a year she had played her part as a spy until she became known as one of the most effective spies working against the Allies. Naturally, all efforts were made to apprehend her, and finally she was taken by the French and sent to where the regiment with which I was living had been quartered.

I didn't see her the day she arrived, because she came at night and was immediately taken to a room and kept captive there. But I had been told that she had come, that she was a dangerous spy and that she would be executed the next morning at sunrise.

Early that morning, I awoke and slipped from the tent in which I lived. Hurriedly I rushed to the meadow where I knew the execution would take place, and I climbed a tree overlooking the field. I must have been there a half-hour before I heard the sound of muffled drums and saw a squad of soldiers approaching with the prisoner between them. I still had not seen the spy herself.

Nor did I see her as she drew near, because the soldiers marched too close to her. However, I saw them line up and I saw two of them march down the field with her, to where a stake had been set up. I saw them turn around and tie her to the stake, and then for the first time I really saw her.

I think that no span of years would ever give me the gift really to tell how she looked that day. It was springtime and she was eighteen years old and she stood and faced the soldiers. She was not merely beautiful, but she seemed to embody within her every grace that was ever known. She wasn't tall, but she had the bearing of an angel. I fell in love with her the moment I saw her.

The soldiers who had escorted her to the stake marched back and fell into line. The commanding officer stood to the side. The shooting line was formed. The officer unsheathed his sword and said "Ready; aim." Then Elissa Sigourney smiled. And I almost fell from the tree in horror at the thought that in a moment she would be dead.

The soldiers had raised their rifles to their shoulders. "Fire," said the officer. But there was no shot. "Fire," said the officer, and his lips trembled. Still there was no shot. I could see the backs of the soldiers shaking, as they stood there and looked at Elissa Sigourney smile. And boy as I was, I knew that that day there was no one among them who would pull the trigger at the girl standing before them.

For five minutes they stood there, and the officer could not repeat the command. Finally, I saw him sheath his sword. Two soldiers marched to the stake, unloosened the bonds and returned with the prisoner. Again the drums beat, and marching between the squad, Elissa Sigourney marched back to the barracks.

I slipped down from the tree and ran back to my tent. My absence had not been noticed, my excitement was overlooked in the general excitement that prevailed throughout the camp when the story had been made known. Later in the day the sergeant, who had become closer to me than any of the soldiers, took me aside and asked me if I knew what had happened. I said, yes, but I could not tell him what I had seen. However, he seemed to know, and it was as though he was sharing something with me when he told me that the execution had been deferred for a week.

A week went by, but I didn't see Elissa Sigourney. But I knew that she was still confined in her room and I counted the days when once more the soldiers would march to the meadow and once more lead her to the stake and once more receive the command to fire.

The days passed and the time set for the execution arrived.

Again, early in the morning I slipped out of the tent and returned to my tree. Again I heard the muffled beat of the drums and the scene repeated itself. Elissa Sigourney was led to the stake. The firing squad lined up and an officer stood aside, this time the second ranking officer of the regiment. The commands were given and again when the word Aim was said, Elissa Sigourney smiled. Again the word Fire brought no response. Three times the officer said Fire, and three times the soldiers stood, guns pointed at the stake, not a shot forthcoming.

From my tree, I saw the soldiers march to the stake and untie the captive. I saw the officer, furious with rage, assemble the squad and march back to the barracks.

This time when I returned, I sought out the sergeant, and told him what I had seen. He knew what had happened, and sympathetically let me cry on his shoulder, mostly for joy that Elissa Sigourney still lived.

It was the sergeant who then kept me informed day by day as to what was happening. The Colonel had been furious that the firing squad had refused to obey orders. The first squad had been disciplined. But when the second squad returned, the Colonel evidently felt that it would be necessary to discipline the whole regiment in order to obtain any effect, and that was out of the question. The sergeant also told me how worried the Colonel was that Elissa Sigourney was still living. It was not safe to have any of the soldiers go near her. Sooner or later, he knew, her jailer or jailers would succumb to her charms; no one could remain in contact with her without confiding in her. The Colonel felt that she would, simply by being herself, exert such an influence over the men in the regiment, that someone would free her and she would once more be able to take up her dangerous and effective work against the Cause.

The Colonel was puzzled and the sergeant told me that one conference after another had been held by the Staff, and that nothing, apparently, could be done. An execution by a firing squad was necessary, and certainly there was no one in the regiment who would do her any violence by himself. The sergeant added that at the last conference, a second lieutenant, who had been a barber in private life, had told the Colonel that he had a way of solving the problem, and that if he were allowed to spend one hour a day with Elissa Sigourney, he would assure them that the next firing squad would obey the command given to it.

The Colonel, who was himself a most humane man, and as moved as anyone by the charms of the prisoner, had only given his consent on the condition that no bodily harm be done to her, and the lieutenant had said that no harm would be done. The proposal of the lieutenant had been accepted and two months went by. Elissa Sigourney was kept a prisoner. No one but the lieutenant had access to her room, and he spent one hour a day within it.

Then, in the first week of June, I noticed one night that something was exciting the men at the table where we ate. After dinner, I sought out the Sergeant, and he told me that the execution of Elissa Sigourney had been ordered for the next morning. That night I didn't sleep.

When the sun's first rays gradually spread over the country, I was up. I left the tent and ran to the tree. Hurriedly I climbed it and concealed myself in its foliage. An hour went by and the countryside gradually lightened. Then I heard the beat of drums. Then I saw a squad of soldiers marching to the meadow in front of my tree. But I noticed that the soldiers were not marching the way soldiers do. In the middle of them was an indistinct figure which I could see but dimly. I did see that on each side of the prisoner, the soldiers were swaying and that they marched in uneven rhythm and seemed to pull away from the captive in their midst, and then regain themselves and attempt a soldierly gait, trying to fall in line again. They marched this way from the barracks, as though there were something in the middle they were trying to pull away from, and then, being soldiers, returned to it.

Then they came close to the tree and, as they came, closed in somewhat, so that I could not see the prisoner. They turned their backs to me and the squad lined up and two marched to the stake with the captive between them. Then they turned, and I almost fell out of the tree.

There was she who had been Elissa Sigourney. There was her body and there was all its grace, but the face was the face of a monster. There was hair covering the chin, and there was hair on the side of her cheeks and there was hair on her upper lip and her face was something never seen before.

I clutched the branches of the tree, and I think my horror paralyzed me and let me retain my grip and I stared.

Quickly the soldiers lined up. The officer stood aside. "Ready," he said, and the apparition at the stake smiled. "Aim," he said, and before he could say "Fire," the shots had rung out.

I saw the impact on the body, and I saw it shake, and I saw the head, the whole body topple over, and then I fell from the tree.

The soldiers must have carried me back, because I did not know what had happened until that night when once again I heard the drums. I was told that Elissa Sigourney was being buried. But that night, her face had been shaved, for the last time, according to her last request, and she was laid under the ground with as fair a face as she had ever had.

So, whenever I smell that smell, I remember how I was in France then, and I know by that smell that I have been in the country.

I often try to find that beach because maybe the sun sometimes shines all day, and I want to get back. But I can't find it. I walk and I walk and I can't reach it.

Once I thought I would ask somebody how to get there so I walked into the city and I turned my head to the left. And thousands of people rushed by and wouldn't stop. I asked them and no one would stop and speak to me. If I stood in front of them, they ran around me. And I just was going to turn my head to the right when I saw a young man walking slowly. When he got to me I stopped him and asked him if he knew where the beach was. I'm alone, he said, and I have been alone for two years. I come from a small town and I don't know anyone here. I work in a department store and I have no friends. At home, I had lots of friends and they were all nice people. But here, I don't know any one. Once I almost came to know some nice people, but something went wrong.

The girl came into the store, but let me tell you a story:

He hadn't felt so happy for six months. Here he was, in a well-furnished living-room in the midst of a room full of young people. People of his own age and class. He was being accepted as one of them. They were talking to him, listening to what he had to say, and laughing when he passed some pleasantry. It was Paradise, but with a sinister thought always recurring: how could he be sure that he would keep this, that this was not to be one isolated evening, to be counted as a night of pleasure among hundreds of lonesome ones? How could he consolidate himself with this group, make sure that he would retain these people as friends for amusement and companionship for other evenings?

It was just by chance that he was here. For a year now, since he had arrived in the city from his home in the Middle West, he had been selling on the floor of one of the city's large department stores. And he didn't know any one in the city. His fellow salesmen and salesgirls had offered him none of the companionship he was seeking. Their tastes and background were not his. One year, filled with lonely evenings spent in his small room in his rooming-house, had gone by, and tonight was the first night he had been happy.

And his presence at this party was just a lucky chance. He had sold that day several men's ties to his present hostess. She had been struck by his out-of-town accent. They came from neighboring cities in the same state. She was interested and, quickly overcoming his reserve, elicited the story of his lonely life in the city. Touched by his sincere lonesomeness and niceness, she had invited him to her house for this evening, where a group of her friends was giving her a farewell party before she sailed for Europe the next day.

Here he was, eagerly drinking in the presence of people around him, the sight of well-bred young faces, their sounds and above all their response to him. But what could he do to make these things more than a brief and transitory pleasure? Certainly he could say to any of the girls with whom he had exchanged a few words: "May I see you again some time?" But it was hard to do. Suppose, by some chance, he received a rebuff? The magic would be gone from the evening. The pleasure would be fled and he would be back within himself again.

And could he explain, if the answer were favorable, that he couldn't really afford to go out, that at best a movie was all he could do? Certainly he couldn't say this. And probably it would be presumptuous and seem like pushing to ask a girl to see her again after this one meeting. They all seemed so much one group and so sure of seeing each other again frequently, and he would be making himself an outsider if he even made such a request. And perhaps he would be casually asked with whom he had come, did he know so-and-so?

Laughing, talking, drinking, he ominously felt the time go by. Now there was a couple saying goodbye to the hostess at the door. Soon they would all go for their hats and coats. Desperately he turned to the girl on his left: "Tell me, mayn't I see you again some time?" She laughed: "You're kidding." "No, I mean it." "Why, I thought everyone in the city knew I was engaged to Bob." She laughed again and called across the room: "Bob, you'll have to treat me better. Here's the nicest young man in the place wanting to make a date with me." Everyone laughed, and he joined in, but he knew it was over now. How could he ask anyone else in the room now?

More people were at the door with hats and coats on. The room was beginning to empty. He stood up and went to the next room to get his hat and coat. People were all around him, laughing at the confusion the room was in. Now he was at the door saying goodbye to the hostess. "You'll come over again when I get back, won't you?" "I certainly want to."

He went down in the elevator with two couples who drove him to the subway station. There he said good night. An hour later he turned out the light over his bed and went to sleep.

When he finished talking, we shook hands, and I started to walk along with him. But we kept walking and walking, and he began to walk faster than I. Wait, I said, I want to ask you something. No, I can't wait. I see some people. Please wait, I called—but he was going faster and faster and I couldn't keep up with him and all of a sudden he joined a group of people and ran down the street. And I knew there was no use trying to find him any more.

e.

Rumson called me up today.
Rumson had his little say.

Rumson said that things are slow.
What comes next, he doesn't know.

Rumson said there are no buyers.
All the trade is filled with criers.

No one wants a six-eared toad.
No one wants a piece of lode.
Toothless nuns are a drug on the market.
Nobody will buy a genuine sarket.
Fair-haired wobs can't get a bid
No one will take an icy nid.

Rumson said I shouldn't worry
Pretty soon there'll be a flurry:

Wobs and nids and genuine sarkets
Can't go long without good markets,
Toothless nuns can't drop from sight.
Whistle—it will be all right.

As Allan Gray walked down the hill, Rumson started up. At the halfway point they met, and then, naturally, Allan returned to the top of the hill and Rumson retraced his steps to the bottom. This continued for upwards of an hour. Finally, Allan said, with an undercurrent of emotion almost manifest in his face: "What did you say your name was?"

"Rumson," said the other, "Rumson, just Rumson."

"It's a good name," said Allan.

"It's the best."

"And what is it you will be having with me?"

Rumson pondered. Ten minutes went by. Finally, and effortlessly, Rumson declared: "I am your best friend." There was a pause, followed by a longer one. Allan reviewed his past history in the first pause, and foretold his future in the second.

"It's a deal," he said.

This may seem a somewhat odd way of indicating just how Rumson came into my life, but in the interest of brevity, it seems the best way. I might have told you what preceded and what necessitated it, but there is not at present any need for these details. Considering the situation in retrospect, these factors are no more than details, and I am not what is known as a detail man. At any rate, Rumson, my best friend, came into my life and changed it. Or at least he changed it for a while. You see, I haven't been in touch with Rumson for a long while now, and I do think he has gone for good.

I remember the day we went swimming. I couldn't swim, and Rumson couldn't either, but we took along someone who could, and Rumson and I had an excellent time.

It was on the way back that Rumson wrote my epitaph. You see, for some time, I had been contemplating suicide, but I just had not got around to it.

Of course, if I had found the room with ten people, or if there hadn't been so many faces, I would have given up the idea. But the room seemed further and further away. And the faces were drawing closer and closer—often there would just be a face—and I had about decided that suicide—or, as I called it, "Putting the cards away"—was the best thing to do. Of course, I wanted an epitaph first. Later on, one would do me no good.

"Write me an epitaph," I said to Rumson.

"Is it your birthday?"

"Yes."

This is my birthday. This is my deathday.
Quickly the bullet speeds now my breath 'way . . .
The earth will welcome without complaint
Winner or loser, sinner or saint.
Who knows a reason, or what makes sense?
A month from now or a century hence,
The worms may find, in a putrid mess
The subtle seeds of unsuccess.

"But what has that to do with me?" I asked.

"Nothing," he answered. "But that is the point. It would have had a great deal to do with you."

We got there then and so stopped talking and parted. When I got home, I put a curse on Rumson. It goes like this:

You shall sire a black black monster
With ears on his hands and an eye on his ponster.
Hair shall grow where his eyes ought to be
Instead of two shoulders he shall have three.
Fungus shall grow on the back of his neck,
His lips shall stretch the length of a deck.
A nose shall grow on the side of each wrist,
His spine shall curve with a corkscrew twist.
His breath shall stink with the reek of the dead,
Two black rats shall live in his head.
His brow shall be like the blade of a knife
And he shall live till the end of your life.

I thought that made us even, and being best friends, we should be even.

And that's all I intend to write about Rumson. He came into my life. He called me Allan, and then we parted. I know that I am getting tired. The only answer to that is that I ought to be.

Tonight when they come, I am going away with them

JAY WILLIAMS

A Tin Halo for the Sergeant

The rain danced away from slick pavements; in the dim-out a dark yeast of drifters surged restlessly along Broadway. Sergeant Antonio shouldered his way across from the subway and was at once, miraculously, at peace within the side street.

What'll I say to them? he thought over and over. I suppose they'll want to know how I knocked out a Jap patrol. He found himself framing sentences in his head: The glorious charge. Undaunted against overwhelming odds. Christ, he said to himself, I'm talking like a goddamned hero.

The square, hollow entrance of No. 39 was unlighted, although a dismal yellow glow like burning tallow bathed it from the glass door of Milady's Hat Shoppe. Sergeant Antonio shook out his raincoat and lit a match; he squinted down the line of bells until he found the one marked Mulva.

Nervousness made him fall back into an old habit: he began to bite away the skin from the corner of a fingernail. The buzzer sounded; the latch clicked. At the foot of the stairs he could hear the noise of the party, the clomp and shuffle, the beating of a victrola record, the rattle of voices. A door opened, spilling laughter down to him.

"Who's that?" someone yelled.

Sergeant Antonio craned his neck up the stair-well anxiously. "It's me!" he shouted. "Joe!"

"Joe? Well for sweet Jesus' sake, come on up!" Whoever it was must have turned away, and he heard them talking incoherently, a mumble of sounds out of which emerged, "Joe . . . Joe . . . Joe."

Sergeant Antonio climbed the stairs slowly. The freshly healed stitches in his thigh pulled against the movement of his muscles. He rested a hand heavily on the bannister, unconscious of the sense of drama which made him lean just a little more heavily than was necessary, made him emphasize the slight limp he would always wear now.

When he entered the apartment someone began singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow." Others picked it up: some sheepishly, a few heartily, until all were singing. Dolly Marlin, leaning against the mantelpiece, sang with shining eyes, one red-nailed hand keeping careless time. Sergeant Antonio looked about him shyly, on edge, mostly aware of Dolly's wide eyes and silk legs. Nick Mulva, sensing his difficulty, handed him a highball. He raised it to the room and drank, feeling strength in the cold glass.

"Put your coat in here, Joe," said fat Nina. She led the way to the bedroom. "We're just dying to hear all about—Well, I mean, don't talk about anything you don't want to, but after all you did so well. We were all so excited for you." She embraced herself with thick arms and beamed at him.

"I understand," said Sergeant Antonio. The first embarrassment had died away; it was only a party after all. The old gang; the friends he had always known. They'd naturally want to know what it was like being under fire.

Well, what was it like? As he folded his raincoat automatically and placed it neatly on the bed with his overseas cap on top, he tried to think of things he could tell the old gang. He found that impressions were blurred and jumbled together; nothing of tension or fright or exultation stood out clearly. There was the time he had cornered the two Japs in the drainage trench. That was his first wielding of death; the first time he had killed another man, an enemy. The little one had said nothing, lying huddled in the corner of the ditch, glaring with hands folded over the slow blood from his stomach. But the one with the beard had shouted, mouthing sharp-edged words like curses. Sergeant Antonio turned helplessly away from his memory. How could you explain that combination of hatred and pity, of nervous, bitter excitement? Perhaps, he thought wryly, they'd rather hear about the mosquitoes, or the ticks, or the snakes.

"Come on, Joe," Nina said impatiently. "Everybody's waiting to see you."

"Be right there," he said. He tucked his shirt in more snugly and straightened the campaign ribbon over his pocket.

The party had overflowed into the kitchen and the hall. The chatter increased with a kind of strained, determined air of nothing out of the ordinary, as Sergeant Antonio limped behind Nina nodding to friends and smiling absently. In the living-room a girl he didn't know by name got up and offered him her seat on the couch.

"I can stand up," he said awkwardly. "That's why they let me out of the hospital."

"Ha, ha. Go on, take it easy," Nick said, hearty moon-face abeam. He had a glass in each hand. He gave them both to Sergeant Antonio. "When you finish those I'll get you two more," he chuckled. "I know you army men."

"Yeah." Sergeant Antonio drank a little from one of the glasses and apologetically handed the other to the girl who had given him her seat. "Well," he said, "what's new?"

"What's new?" Sol Almonizer threw up his hands. "The boy spends thirty-six days on Gona under fire, wipes out half-a-dozen Jap patrols with his bare hands, gets himself full of shrapnel—oh, I'm sorry," he finished lamely.

"It doesn't matter," Sergeant Antonio said. He grinned feebly at Sol, writhing inwardly with the other's unhappiness, searching for the comforting word. "I don't even feel it now. Lots of fellows got it worse."

Oh God, he thought, I sound like one of these brave, chin-up boys.

"What—how did it happen?" Nina asked breathlessly, gathering in her bosom with fat, grey arms.

Sergeant Antonio finished his drink. "I hardly remember," he said, and realized how false the conventional modesty must sound. He straightened himself in his seat, pulling away the wrinkled summer issue trousers from his crotch. "Why, ah, it happened so quickly, I mean," he amended.

"I was feeding the gun," he explained. "The gunner got hit. I saw he was dead and I knew they had our range. I figured I'd get the gun to another point. So I started crawling back with it, and on the way they dropped one near me. That's all."

But that wasn't all. His audience had increased; people were standing about respectfully, waiting for him to continue, and he could find no speech. He thought of the mud, of the five-and-a-half hours he had inched himself along, weakly fighting away the flies, thinking with numb terror of lockjaw and gangrene and remembering descriptions of how limbs blackened and rotted with mortification. He thought of his terror when something had rustled slyly in the underbrush; imagining it was a twenty-minute snake he had begun to pray within himself, weeping at the intolerable nagging agony of his thigh, and half wishing for death. But he had lived. . . .

"Weren't you scared?" someone asked.

He swallowed his thoughts; reached for another drink. "Sure."

"It just sort of numbs you, doesn't it?" a fellow said.

"Yeah," he answered. "That's it."

Dolly Marlin separated herself from the crowd and sat on the arm of the couch. "I want to hear all about everything," she announced shrilly. "I think you were a real hero, Joe. I want to hear how you killed Japs."

She was probably a little drunk. There was an uncomfortable silence. At last Nick said, "Dolly, for Christ's sake lay off. Joe's not interested."

"I don't know why not," she demanded. "After all, you can see plenty of soldiers any day, but these jeeps don't kill people. I mean, you don't meet somebody you know every day that's killed those little yellow bastards." She spoke quite calmly, argumentatively, although her voice was pitched higher than ordinarily.

"Why," said Sergeant Antonio (he had a trick of beginning most of his sentences with 'why'; he had picked it up in camp in Kentucky), "why those other boys all have their work to do, Dolly. I just did my work, too."

"Work? You're a scream, Joe," Dolly said. "Imagine," she said to the others, "he calls it work. Fighting!" She giggled and hiccupped. "Pardon," she said.

"No, really," Sergeant Antonio protested. "I just want to know what's been going on here while I've been away. How's the old bunch? Where's Angelo? I didn't see him here."

"He got drafted last week," Sol explained. "I'll be called up in a couple weeks, I guess. Nothing much else. Oh yes, Nick works in a defense plant now."

"Honest? You gave up your job, then?"

Nick nodded, round face solemn. "No future in it. I took myself to the McDuffy Institute and I am now a lathe operator. Better lathe than early, huh? Ha, ha!"

Everyone laughed politely.

"Well, what about—" Sergeant Antonio began. Dolly quickly put an arm about his neck and pulled him backwards. "Joe, honey," she said. "Honest, Joe, I'll never even talk to you again. What you want to bother about that stuff for? *I'll* tell you: everybody's just the same, in a rut. Black markets, no meat, no car rides, no nothing. All the men are drafted. Everybody buys war stamps. I want to hear about something exciting."

"Why, Dolly," Sergeant Antonio said. He smiled foolishly at her without knowing how to go on. "Well, what can I tell you?" he said after a moment.

"How many Japs did you kill?" the girl asked.

Sergeant Antonio rubbed the back of his neck; looked morosely at the floor, blushing. "I don't know," he said. "Should I have notched my gun?"

"Don't be a sourpuss, Joe," Dolly laughed. "Tell us about how you wiped up the patrols."

"They had all about that in the papers," said Sergeant Antonio. "You read all that."

"In the papers," she mimicked him. "My God, don't you have *any* sense than to know the papers always get everything wrong?"

Sergeant Antonio carefully bit the corner off one of his fingernails. He tried to retell the story simply, but the words tasted flat and sour.

"Why, you know how the Japs do," he said. "They used to tie a rope to a branch about fifty feet away and pull on it. Some dummy would fire at the moving branch and then the Jap sniper would pick the guy off, from the flash of his rifle. They're smart but they never learn. We got so we'd look to the side when we saw a branch moving and we'd spot them and down they would come.

"Well, I was in—" he hesitated, "in command of a reconnaissance unit. We stumbled into a couple of Japanese patrols. So I just used that trick: I had a couple of the men planted back in the bush with ropes tied onto branches and the Japs just walked into us. And we got them. That was all."

Dolly watched his lips wide-eyed. "Did you bayonet them?" she whispered.

"Uh . . . no. Grenades." Sergeant Antonio uncrossed his legs and wriggled uncomfortably. People had wandered away, leaving Dolly a clear field.

"I think that's wonderful," Dolly said. She slipped down from the arm of the sofa and nestled beside him. "I think you're a real hero, Joe. I always knew it. When you first went, I always said I knew you'd be a hero."

"Uh-huh." Sergeant Antonio looked up at Nick who shrugged and shook his head, turning away. Sol said, "See you later, Joe," and went with him. They both headed for the kitchen where a lively crap game was in progress.

"Tell me some more, Joe," said Dolly. She drew her legs up so that her knees pressed his thigh insinuatingly. The scars twitched nervously, tautly, away from the gentle hinting touch.

Sergeant Antonio looked closely at her. Her lipstick was a little smudged, but her clear complexion and dark-lashed, round eyes were as he remembered them, seen in automobiles or dimly in movie balconies in the old days. The old days; his long starvation reached tentatively for her submission and admiration.

After all, it was true: he had been wounded in action. The mysterious phrase set itself sharply in his brain: Wounded in Action. But to be called a hero—a goddamned hero. If they heard about it back in the barracks . . .

"What do you want to know?" he asked.

"Well, what's this ribbon for? Is that a sort of medal?"

"No. That's just for service overseas."

"Oh. I see." She edged closer, pressed herself against his side, one arm still tight around his neck. "Tell me about the first time you ever killed one of them," she said.

"Why, Dolly," Sergeant Antonio said abstractedly, "you don't want to hear about that. It was . . . It wasn't such . . ."

She nudged him with her free hand. "Wake up, Joe," she said irritably, and in a whisper, close to his ear, "My Hero," she added.

Sergeant Antonio sighed. "Why, it was like this," he began. "I was assigned to a scouting detail."

The pale phrases mocked his recollection.

RALPH ELLISON

Flying Home

When Todd came to, he saw two faces suspended above him in a sun so hot and blinding that he could not tell if they were black or white. He stirred, feeling a pain that burned as though his whole body had been laid open to the sun which glared into his eyes. For a moment an old fear of being touched by white hands seized him. Then the very sharpness of the pain began slowly to clear his head. Sounds came to him dimly. *He done come to.* Who are they? he thought. *Naw he ain't, I coulda sworn he was white.* Then he heard clearly,

"You hurt bad?"

Something within him uncoiled. It was a Negro sound.

"He's still out," he heard.

"Give 'im time. . . . Say, son, you hurt bad?"

Was he? There was that awful pain. He lay rigid, hearing their breathing and trying to weave a meaning between them and his being stretched painfully upon the ground. He watched them warily, his mind traveling back over a painful distance. Jagged scenes, swiftly unfolding as in a movie trailer, reeled through his mind, and he saw himself piloting a tailspinning plane and landing and falling from the cockpit and trying to stand. Then, as in a great silence, he remembered the sound of crunching bone and, now, looking up into the anxious faces of an old Negro man and a boy from where he lay in the same field, the memory sickened him and he wanted to remember no more.

"How you feel, son?"

Todd hesitated, as though to answer would be to admit an inacceptable weakness. Then, "It's my ankle," he said.

"Which one?"

"The left."

With a sense of remoteness he watched the old man bend and remove his boot, feeling the pressure ease.

"That any better?"

"A lot. Thank you."

He had the sensation of discussing someone else, that his concern was with some far more important thing, which for some reason escaped him.

"You done broke it bad," the old man said. "We have to get you to a doctor."

He felt that he had been thrown into a tailspin. He looked at his watch; how long had he been here? He knew there was but one important thing in the world, to get the plane back to the field before his officers were displeased.

"Help me up," he said. "Into the ship."

"But it's broke too bad. . . ."

"Give me your arm!"

"But, son . . ."

Clutching the old man's arm he pulled himself up, keeping his left leg clear, thinking, "I'd never make him understand," as the leather-smooth face came parallel with his own.

"Now, let's see."

He pushed the old man back, hearing a bird's insistent shrill. He swayed, giddily. Blackness washed over him, like infinity.

"You best sit down."

"No, I'm O.K."

"But, son. You jus' gonna make it worse. . . ."

It was a fact that everything in him cried out to deny, even against the flaming pain in his ankle. He would have to try again.

"You mess with that ankle they have to cut your foot off," he heard.

Holding his breath, he started up again. It pained so badly that he had to bite his lips to keep from crying out and he allowed them to help him down with a pang of despair.

"It's best you take it easy. We gon' git you a doctor."

Of all the luck, he thought. Of all the rotten luck, now I have done it. The fumes of high-octane gasoline clung in the heat, taunting him.

"We kin ride him into town on old Ned," the boy said.

Ned? He turned, seeing the boy point toward an ox team, browsing where the buried blade of a plow marked the end of a furrow. Thoughts of himself riding an ox through the town, past streets full of white faces, down the concrete runways of the airfield made swift images of humiliation in his mind. With a pang he remembered his girl's last letter. "Todd," she had written, "I don't need the papers to tell me you had the intelligence to fly. And I have always known you to be as brave as anyone else. The papers annoy me. Don't you be contented to prove over and over again that you're brave or skillful just because you're black, Todd. I think they keep beating that dead horse because they don't want to say why you boys are not yet fighting. I'm really disappointed, Todd. Anyone with brains can learn to fly, but then what. What about using it, and who will you use it for? I wish, dear, you'd write about this. I sometimes think they're playing a trick on us. It's very humiliating. . . ." He whipped cold sweat from his face, thinking, What does she know of humiliation? She's never been down South. *Now* the humiliation would come. When you must have them judge you, knowing that they never accept your mistakes as your own, but hold it against your whole race—that was humiliation. Yes, and humiliation was when you could never be simply yourself; when you were always a part of this old black ignorant man. Sure, he's all right. Nice and kind and helpful. But he's not you. Well, there's one humiliation I can spare myself.

"No," he said, "I have orders not to leave the ship. . . ."

"Aw," the old man said. Then turning to the boy, "Teddy, then you better hustle down to Mister Graves and get him to come. . . ."

"No, wait!" he protested before he was fully aware. Graves might be white. "Just have him get word to the field, please. They'll take care of the rest."

He saw the boy leave, running.

"How far does he have to go?"

"Might' nigh a mile."

He rested back, looking at the dusty face of his watch. But now they know something has happened, he thought. In the ship there was a perfectly good radio, but it was useless. The old fellow would never operate it. That buzzard knocked me back a hundred years, he thought. Irony danced within him like the gnats circling the old man's head. With all I've learned I'm dependent upon this "peasant's" sense of time and space. His leg throbbed. In the plane, instead of time being measured by the rhythms of pain and a kid's legs, the instruments would have told him at a glance. Twisting upon his elbows he saw where dust had powdered the plane's fuselage, feeling the lump form in his throat that was always there when he thought of flight. It's crouched there, he thought, like the abandoned shell of a locust. I'm naked without it. Not a machine, a suit of clothes you wear. And with a sudden embarrassment and wonder he whispered, "It's the only dignity I have. . . ."

He saw the old man watching, his torn overalls clinging limply to him in the heat. He felt a sharp need to tell the old man what he felt. But that would be meaningless. If I tried to explain why I need to fly back, he'd think I was simply afraid of white officers. But it's more than fear . . . a sense of anguish clung to him like the veil of sweat that hugged his face. He watched the old man, hearing him humming snatches of a tune as he admired the plane. He felt a furtive sense of resentment. Such old men often came to the field to watch the pilots with childish eyes. At first it had made him proud; they had been a meaningful part of a new experience. But soon he realized they did not understand his accomplishments and they came to shame and embarrass him, like the distasteful praise of an idiot. A part of the meaning of flying had gone, then, and he had not been able to regain it. If I were a prize-fighter I would be more human, he thought. Not a monkey doing tricks, but a man. They were pleased simply that he was a Negro who could fly, and that was not enough. He felt cut off from them by age, by understanding, by sensibility, by technology and by his need to measure himself against the mirror of other men's appreciation. Somehow he felt betrayed, as he had when as a child he grew to discover that his father was dead. Now, for him, any real appreciation lay with his white officers; and with them he could never be sure. Between ignorant black men and condescending whites, his course of flight seemed mapped by the nature of things away from all needed and natural landmarks. Under some sealed orders, couched in ever more technical and mysterious terms, his path curved swiftly away from both the shame the old man symbolized and the cloudy terrain of white man's regard. Flying blind, he knew but one point of landing and there he would receive his wings. After that the enemy would appreciate his skill and he would assume his deepest meaning, he thought sadly, neither from those who condescended nor from those who praised without understanding, but from the enemy who would recognize his manhood and skill in terms of hate. . . .

He sighed, seeing the oxen making queer, prehistoric shadows against the dry brown earth.

"You just take it easy, son," the old man soothed. "That boy won't take long. Crazy as he is about airplanes."

"I can wait," he said.

"What kinda airplane you call this here'n?"

"An Advanced Trainer," he said, seeing the old man smile. His fingers were like gnarled dark wood against the metal as he touched the low-slung wing.

" 'Bout how fast can she fly?"

"Over two hundred an hour."

"Lawd! That's so fast I bet it don't seem like you moving!"

Holding himself rigid, Todd opened his flying suit. The shade had gone and he lay in a ball of fire.

"You mind if I take a look inside? I was always curious to see . . ."

"Help yourself. Just don't touch anything."

He heard him climb upon the metal wing, grunting. Now the questions would start. Well, so you don't have to think to answer. . . .

He saw the old man looking over into the cockpit, his eyes bright as a child's.

"You must have to know a lot to work all these here things."

He was silent, seeing him step down and kneel beside him.

"Son, how come you want to fly way up there in the air?"

Because it's the most meaningful act in the world . . . because it makes me less like you, he thought.

But he said: "Because I like it, I guess. It's as good a way to fight and die as I know."

"Yeah? I guess you right," the old man said. "But how long you think before they gonna let you all fight?"

He tensed. This was the question all Negroes asked, put with the same timid hopefulness and longing that always opened a greater void within him than that he had felt beneath the plane the first time he had flown. He felt lightheaded. It came to him suddenly that there was something sinister about the conversation, that he was flying unwillingly into unsafe and uncharted regions. If he could only be insulting and tell this old man who was trying to help him to shut up!

"I bet you one thing . . ."

"Yes?"

"That you was plenty scared coming down."

He did not answer. Like a dog on a trail the old man seemed to smell out his fears and he felt anger bubble within him.

"You sho' scared *me*. When I seen you coming down in that thing with it a-rollin' and a-jumpin' like a pitchin' hoss, I thought sho' you was a goner. I almost had me a stroke!"

He saw the old man grinning, "Ever'thin's been happening round here this morning, come to think of it."

"Like what?" he asked.

"Well, first thing I know, here come two white fellers looking for Mister Rudolph, that's Mister Graves' cousin. That got me worked up right away. . . .

"Why?"

"Why? 'Cause he done broke outta the crazy house, that's why. He liable to kill somebody," he said. "They oughta have him by now though. Then here *you* come. First I think it's one of them white boys. Then doggone if you don't fall outta there. Lawd, I'd done heard about you boys but I haven't never *seen* one o' you-all. Cain't tell you how it felt to see somebody what look like me in a airplane!"

The old man talked on, the sound streaming around Todd's thoughts like air flowing over the fuselage of a flying plane. You were a fool, he thought, remembering how before the spin the sun had blazed, bright against the billboard signs beyond the town, and how a boy's blue kite had bloomed beneath him, tugging gently in the wind like a strange, odd-shaped flower. He had once flown such kites himself and tried to find the boy at the end of the invisible cord. But he had been flying too high and too fast. He had climbed steeply away in exultation. Too steeply, he thought. And one of the first rules you learn is that if the angle of thrust is too steep the plane goes into a spin. And then, instead of pulling out of it and going into a dive you let a buzzard panic you. A lousy buzzard!

"Son, what made all that blood on the glass?"

"A buzzard," he said, remembering how the blood and feathers had sprayed back against the hatch. It had been as though he had flown into a storm of blood and blackness.

"Well, I declare! They's lots of 'em around here. They after dead things. Don't eat nothing what's alive."

"A little bit more and he would have made a meal out of me," Todd said grimly.

"They bad luck all right. Teddy's got a name for 'em, calls 'em 'jimcrows,' " the old man laughed.

"It's a damned good name."

"They the damnedest birds. Once I seen a hoss all stretched out like he was sick, you know. So I hollers, 'Gid up from there, suh!' Just to make sho! An, doggone, son, if I don't see two ole jimcrows come flying right up outa that hoss's insides! Yessuh! The sun was shinin' on 'em and they couldn't a been no greasier if they'd been eating barbecue!"

Todd thought he would vomit, his stomach quivered.

"You made that up," he said.

"Nawsuh! Saw him just like I see you."

"Well, I'm glad it was you."

"You see lots a funny things down here, son."

"No, I'll let you see them," he said.

"By the way, the white folks round here don't like to see you boys up there in the sky. They ever bother you?"

"No."

"Well, they'd like to."

"Someone always wants to bother someone else," Todd said. "How do you know?"

"I just know."

"Well," he said defensively, "no one has bothered us."

Blood pounded in his ears as he looked away into space. He tensed, seeing a black spot in the sky and strained to confirm what he could not clearly see.

"What does that look like to you?" he asked excitedly.

"Just another bad luck, son."

Then he saw the movement of wings with disappointment. It was gliding smoothly down, wings outspread, tail feathers gripping the air, down swiftly —gone behind the green screen of trees. It was like a bird he had imagined there, only the sloping branches of the pines remained, sharp against the pale stretch of sky. He lay barely breathing and stared at the point where it had disappeared, caught in a spell of loathing and admiration. Why did they make them so disgusting and yet teach them to fly so well? *It's like when I was up in heaven* he heard, starting.

The old man was chuckling, rubbing his stubbed chin.

"What did you say?"

"Sho', I died and went to heaven . . . maybe by time I tell you about it they be done come after you."

"I hope so," he said wearily.

"You boys ever sit around and swap lies?"

"Not often. Is this going to be one?"

"Well, I ain't so sho', on account of it took place when I was dead."

The old man paused, "That wasn't no lie 'bout the buzzards, though."

"All right," he said.

"Sho' you want to hear 'bout heaven?"

"Please," he answered, resting his head upon his arm.

"Well, I went to heaven and right away started to sproutin' me some wings. Six foot ones, they was. Just like them the white angels had. I couldn't hardly believe it. I was so glad that I went off on some clouds by myself and tried 'em out. You know, 'cause I didn't want to make a fool outta myself the first thing. . . ."

It's an old tale, Todd thought. Told me years ago. Had forgotten. But at least it will keep him from talking about buzzards.

He closed his eyes, listening.

". . . First thing I done was to git up on a low cloud and jump off. And doggone, boy, if them wings didn't work! First I tried the right; then I tried the left; then I tried 'em both together. Then, Lawd, I started to move on out among the folks. I let 'em see me. . . ."

He saw the old man gesturing flight with his arms, his face full of mock pride as he indicated an imaginary crowd, thinking, *It'll be in the newspapers,* as he heard, ". . . so I went and found me some colored angels—somehow I didn't believe I was an angel 'til I seen a real black one, ha, yes! Then I was sho'—but they tole me I better come down 'cause us colored folks had to wear a special kin'a harness when we flew. That was how come *they* wasn't flyin'. Oh yes, an' you had to be extra strong for a black man even, to fly with one of them harnesses. . . ."

This is a new turn, Todd thought, what's he driving at?

"So I said to myself, I ain't gonna be bothered with no harness! Oh naw! 'Cause if God let you sprout wings you oughta have sense enough not to let nobody make you wear something what gits in the way of flyin'. So I starts to flyin'. Hecks, son," he chuckled, his eyes twinkling, "you know I had to let eve'ybody know that old Jefferson could fly good as anybody else. And I could too, fly smooth as a bird! I could even loop-the-loop—only I had to make sho' to keep my long white robe down roun' my ankles. . . ."

Todd felt uneasy. He wanted to laugh at the joke, but his body refused, as of an independent will. He felt as he had as a child when after he had chewed a sugar-coated pill which his mother had given him, she had laughed at his efforts to remove the terrible taste.

". . . Well," he heard. "I was doing all right 'til I got to speeding. Found out I could fan up a right strong breeze, I could fly so fast. I could do all kin'sa stunts too. I started flying up to the stars and divin' down and zooming roun' the moon. Man, I like to scare the devil outa some ole white angels. I was raisin' hell. Not that I meant any harm, son. But I was just feeling good. It was so good to know I was free at last. I accidently knocked the tips offa some stars and they tell me I caused a storm and a coupla lynchings down here in Macon County—though I swear I believe them boys what said that was making up lies on me. . . ."

He's mocking me, Todd thought angrily. He thinks it's a joke. Grinning down at me . . . His throat was dry. He looked at his watch; why the hell didn't they come? Since they had to, why? *One day I was flying down one of them heavenly streets.* You got yourself into it, Todd thought. Like Jonah in the whale.

"Justa throwin' feathers in everybody's face. An' ole Saint Peter called me in. Said, 'Jefferson, tell me two things, what you doin' flyin' without a harness; an' how come you flyin' so fast?' So I tole him I was flyin' without a harness 'cause it got in my way, but I couldn'ta been flyin' so fast, 'cause I wasn't usin' but one wing. Saint Peter said, 'You wasn't flyin' with but *one* wing?' 'Yessuh,' I says, scared-like. So he says, 'Well, since you got sucha extra fine pair of wings you can leave off yo' harness awhile. But from now on none of that there one-wing flyin', 'cause you gittin' up too damn much speed!' "

And with one mouth full of bad teeth you're making too damned much talk, thought Todd. Why don't I send him after the boy? His body ached from the hard ground and seeking to shift his position he twisted his ankle and hated himself for crying out.

"It gittin' worse?"

"I . . . I twisted it," he groaned.

"Try not to think about it, son. That's what I do."

He bit his lip, fighting pain with counter pain as the voice resumed its rhythmical droning. Jefferson seemed caught in his own creation.

". . . After all that trouble I just floated roun' heaven in slow motion. But I forgot like colored folks will do and got to flyin' with one wing agin. This time I was restin' my ole broken arm and got to flyin' fast enough to shame the devil. I was comin' so fast, Lawd, I got myself called befo' ole Saint Peter agin. He said, 'Jeff, didn't I warn you 'bout that speedin'?' 'Yessuh,' I says, 'but it was an accident.' He looked at me sad-like and shook his head and I knowed I was gone. He said, 'Jeff, you and that speedin' is a danger to the heavenly community. If I was to let you keep on flyin', heaven wouldn't be nothin' but uproar. Jeff, you got to go!' Son, I argued and pleaded with that old white man, but it didn't do a bit of good. They rushed me straight to them pearly gates and gimme a parachute and a map of the state of Alabama. . . ."

Todd heard him laughing so that he could hardly speak, making a screen between them upon which his humiliation glowed like fire.

"Maybe you'd better stop a while," he said, his voice unreal.

"Ain't much more," Jefferson laughed. "When they gimme the parachute ole Saint Peter ask me if I wanted to say a few words before I went. I felt so bad I couldn't hardly look at him, specially with all them white angels standin' around. Then somebody laughed and made me mad. So I tole him, 'Well, you done took my wings. And you puttin' me out. You got charge of things so's I can't do nothin' about it. But you got to admit just this: While I was up here I was the flyinest sonofabitch what ever hit heaven!"

At the burst of laughter Todd felt such an intense humiliation that only great violence would wash it away. The laughter which shook the old man like a boiling purge set up vibrations of guilt within him which not even the intricate machinery of the plane would have been adequate to transform and he heard himself screaming, "Why do you laugh at me this way?"

He hated himself at that moment, but he had lost control. He saw Jefferson's mouth fall open, "What——?"

"Answer me!"

His blood pounded as though it would surely burst his temples and he tried to reach the old man and fell, screaming, "Can I help it because they won't let us actually fly? Maybe we are a bunch of buzzards feeding on a dead horse, but we can hope to be eagles, can't we? *Can't we?"*

He fell back, exhausted; his ankle pounding. The saliva was like straw in his mouth. If he had the strength he would strangle this old man. This grinning, grey-headed clown who made him feel as he felt when watched by the white officers at the field. And yet this old man had neither power, prestige, rank nor technique. Nothing that could rid him of this terrible feeling. He watched him, seeing his face struggle to express a turmoil of feeling.

"What you mean, son? What you talking 'bout. . . ?"

"Go away. Go tell your tales to the white folks."

"But I didn't mean nothing like that . . . I . . . I wasn't tryin' to hurt your feelings. . . ."

"Please. Get the hell away from me!"

"But I didn't, son. I didn't mean all them things a-tall."

Todd shook as with a chill, searching Jefferson's face for a trace of the mockery he had seen there. But now the face was somber and tired and old. He was confused. He could not be sure that there had ever been laughter there, that Jefferson had ever really laughed in his whole life. He saw Jefferson reach out to touch him and shrank away, wondering if anything except the pain, now causing his vision to waver, was real. Perhaps he had imagined it all.

"Don't let it get you down, son," the voice said pensively.

He heard Jefferson sigh wearily, as though he felt more than he could say. His anger ebbed, leaving only the pain.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"You just wore out with pain, was all. . . ."

He saw him through a blur, smiling. And for a second he felt the embarrassed silence of understanding flutter between them.

"What you was doin' flyin' over this section, son? Wasn't you scared they might shoot you for a crow?"

Todd tensed. Was he being laughed at again? But before he could decide the pain shook him and a part of him was lying calmly behind the screen of pain that had fallen between them, recalling the first time he had ever seen a plane. It was as though an endless series of hangars had been shaken ajar in the air base of his memory and from each, like a young wasp emerging from its cell, arose the memory of a plane.

The first time I ever saw a plane I was very small and planes were new in the world. I was four-and-a-half and the only plane that I had ever seen was a model suspended from the ceiling of the automobile exhibit at the

State Fair. But I did not know that it was only a model. I did not know how large a real plane was, nor how expensive. To me it was a fascinating toy, complete in itself, which my mother said could only be owned by rich little white boys. I stood rigid with admiration, my head straining backwards as I watched the grey little plane describing arcs above the gleaming tops of the automobiles. And I vowed that, rich or poor, some day I would own such a toy. My mother had to drag me out of the exhibit, and not even the merry-go-round, the Ferris wheel, or the racing horses could hold my attention for the rest of the Fair. I was too busy imitating the tiny drone of the plane with my lips, and imitating with my hands the motion, swift and circling, that it made in flight.

After that I no longer used the pieces of lumber that lay about our back yard to construct wagons and autos . . . now it was used for airplanes. I built bi-planes, using pieces of board for wings, a small box for the fuselage, another piece of wood for the rudder. The trip to the Fair had brought something new into my small world. I asked my mother repeatedly when the Fair would come back again. I'd lie in the grass and watch the sky and each flighting bird became a soaring plane. I would have been good a year just to have seen a plane again. I became a nuisance to everyone with my questions about airplanes. But planes were new to the old folks, too, and there was little that they could tell me. Only my uncle knew some of the answers. And better still, he could carve propellers from pieces of wood that would whirl rapidly in the wind, wobbling noisily upon oiled nails.

I wanted a plane more than I'd wanted anything; more than I wanted the red wagon with rubber tires, more than the train that ran on a track with its train of cars. I asked my mother over and over again:

"Mamma?"

"What do you want, boy?" she'd say.

"Mamma, will you get mad if I ask you?" I'd say.

"What do you want now, I ain't got time to be answering a lot of fool questions. What you want?"

"Mamma, when you gonna get me one . . . ?" I'd ask.

"Get you one what?" she'd say.

"You know, Mamma; what I been asking you. . . ."

"Boy," she'd say, "if you don't want a spanking you better come on 'n tell me what you talking about so I can get on with my work."

"Aw, Mamma, you know. . . ."

"What I just tell you?" she'd say.

"I mean when you gonna buy me a airplane."

"AIRPLANE! Boy, is you crazy? How many times I have to tell you to

stop that foolishness. I done told you them things cost too much. I bet I'm gon' wham the living daylight out of you if you don't quit worrying me 'bout them things!"

But this did not stop me, and a few days later I'd try all over again.

Then one day a strange thing happened. It was spring and for some reason I had been hot and irritable all morning. It was a beautiful spring. I could feel it as I played barefoot in the backyard. Blossoms hung from the thorny black locust trees like clusters of fragrant white grapes. Butterflies flickered in the sunlight above the short new dew-wet grass. I had gone in the house for bread and butter and coming out I heard a steady unfamiliar drone. It was unlike anything I had ever heard before. I tried to place the sound. It was no use. It was a sensation like that I had when searching for my father's watch, heard ticking unseen in a room. It made me feel as though I had forgotten to perform some task that my mother had ordered . . . then I located it, overhead. In the sky, flying quite low and about a hundred yards off was a plane! It came so slowly that it seemed barely to move. My mouth hung wide; my bread and butter fell into the dirt. I wanted to jump up and down and cheer. And when the idea struck I trembled with excitement: "Some little white boy's plane's done flew away and all I got to do is stretch out my hands and it'll be mine!" It was a little plane like that at the Fair, flying no higher than the eaves of our roof. Seeing it come steadily forward I felt the world grow warm with promise. I opened the screen and climbed over it and clung there, waiting. I would catch the plane as it came over and swing down fast and run into the house before anyone could see me. Then no one could come to claim the plane. It droned nearer. Then when it hung like a silver cross in the blue directly above me I stretched out my hand and grabbed. It was like sticking my finger through a soap bubble. The plane flew on, as though I had simply blown my breath after it. I grabbed again, frantically, trying to catch the tail. My fingers clutched the air and disappointment surged tight and hard in my throat. Giving one last desperate grasp, I strained forward. My fingers ripped from the screen. I was falling. The ground burst hard against me. I drummed the earth with my heels and when my breath returned, I lay there bawling.

My mother rushed through the door.

"What's the matter, chile! What on earth is wrong with you?"

"It's gone! It's gone!"

"What gone?"

"The airplane . . ."

"Airplane?"

"Yessum, jus' like the one at the Fair. . . . I . . . I tried to stop it an' it kep' right on going. . . ."

"When, boy?"

"Just now," I cried through my tears.

"Where it go, boy, what way?"

"Yonder, there . . ."

She scanned the sky, her arms akimbo and her checkered apron flapping in the wind as I pointed to the fading plane. Finally she looked down at me, slowly shaking her head.

"It's gone! It's gone!" I cried.

"Boy, is you a fool?" she said. "Don't you see that there's a real airplane 'stead of one of them toy ones?"

"Real . . . ?" I forgot to cry. "Real?"

"Yass, real. Don't you know that thing you reaching for is bigger'n a auto? You here trying to reach for it and I bet it's flying 'bout two hundred miles higher'n this roof." She was disgusted with me. "You come on in this house before somebody else sees what a fool you done turned out to be. You must think these here li'l ole arms of your'n is mighty long. . . ."

I was carried into the house and undressed for bed and the doctor was called. I cried bitterly; as much from the disappointment of finding the plane so far beyond my reach as from the pain.

When the doctor came I heard my mother telling him about the plane and asking if anything was wrong with my mind. He explained that I had had a fever for several hours. But I was kept in bed for a week and I constantly saw the plane in my sleep, flying just beyond my finger tips, sailing so slowly that it seemed barely to move. And each time I'd reach out to grab it I'd miss and through each dream I'd hear my grandma warning:

"Young man, young man
Yo' arm's too short
To box with God. . . ."

"Hey, son!"

At first he did not know where he was and looked at the old man pointing, with blurred eyes.

"Ain't that one of you-all's airplanes coming after you?"

As his vision cleared he saw a small black shape above a distant field, soaring through waves of heat. But he could not be sure and with the pain he feared that somehow a horrible recurring fantasy of being split in twain by the whirling blades of a propeller had come true.

"You think he sees us?" he heard.

"See? I hope so."

"He's coming like a bat outa hell!"

Straining, he heard the faint sound of a motor and hoped it would soon be over.

"How you feeling?"

"Like a nightmare," he said.

"Hey, he's done curved back the other way!"

"Maybe he saw us," he said. "Maybe he's gone to send out the ambulance and ground crew." And, he thought with despair, maybe he didn't even see us.

"Where did you send the boy?"

"Down to Mister Graves," Jefferson said. "Man what owns this land."

"Do you think he phoned?"

Jefferson looked at him quickly.

"Aw sho'. Dabney Graves is got a bad name on accounta them killings but he'll call though. . . ."

"What killings?"

"Them five fellers . . . ain't you heard?" he asked with surprise.

"No."

"Everybody knows 'bout Dabney Graves, especially the colored. He done killed enough of us."

Todd had the sensation of being caught in a white neighborhood after dark.

"What did they do?" he asked.

"Thought they was men," Jefferson said. "An' some he owed money, like he do me. . . ."

"But why do you stay here?"

"You black, son."

"I know, but . . ."

"You have to come by the white folks, too."

He turned away from Jefferson's eyes, at once consoled and accused. And I'll have to come by them soon, he thought with despair. Closing his eyes, he heard Jefferson's voice as the sun burned blood red upon his lids.

"I got nowhere to go," Jefferson said, "an' they'd come after me if I did. But Dabney Graves is a funny fellow. He's all the time making jokes. He can be mean as hell, then he's liable to turn right around and back the colored against the white folks. I seen him do it. But me, I hates him for that more'n anything else. 'Cause just as soon as he gits tired helping a man he don't care what happens to him. He just leaves him stone cold. And then the other white folks is double hard on anybody he done helped. For him it's just a joke. He don't give a hilla beans for nobody—but hisself. . . ."

Todd listened to the thread of detachment in the old man's voice. It was as though he held his words at arm's length before him to avoid their destructive meaning.

"He'd just as soon do you a favor and then turn right around and have you strung up. Me, I stays outa his way 'cause down here that's what you gotta do."

If my ankle would only ease for a while, he thought. The closer I spin toward the earth the blacker I became, flashed through his mind. Sweat ran into his eyes and he was sure that he would never see the plane if his head continued whirling. He tried to see Jefferson, what it was that Jefferson held in his hand? It was a little black man, another Jefferson! A little black Jefferson that shook with fits of belly-laughter while the other Jefferson looked on with detachment. Then Jefferson looked up from the thing in his hand and turned to speak but Todd was far away, searching the sky for a plane in a hot dry land on a day and age he had long forgotten. He was going mysteriously with his mother through empty streets where black faces peered from behind drawn shades and someone was rapping at a window and he was looking back to see a hand and a frightened face frantically beckoning from a cracked door and his mother was looking down the empty perspective of the street and shaking her head and hurrying him along and at first it was only a flash he saw and a motor was droning as through the sun-glare he saw it gleaming silver as it circled and he was seeing a burst like a puff of white smoke and hearing his mother yell, Come along, boy, I got no time for them fool airplanes, I got no time, and he saw it a second time, the plane flying high, and the burst appeared suddenly and fell slowly, billowing out and sparkling like fireworks and he was watching and being hurried along as the air filled with a flurry of white pin-wheeling cards that caught in the wind and scattered over the roof-tops and into the gutters and a woman was running and snatching a card and reading it and screaming and he darted into the shower, grabbing as in winter he grabbed for snowflakes and bounding away at his mother's, Come on here, boy! Come on, I say! and he was watching as she took the card away seeing her face grow puzzled and turning taut as her voice quavered, "Niggers Stay From The Polls," and died to a moan of terror as he saw the eyeless sockets of a white hood staring at him from the card and above he saw the plane spiraling gracefully, agleam in the sun like a fiery sword. And seeing it soar he was caught, transfixed between a terrible horror and a horrible fascination.

The sun was not so high now, and Jefferson was calling and gradually he saw three figures moving across the curving roll of the field.

"Look like some doctors, all dressed in white," said Jefferson.

They're coming at last, Todd thought. And he felt such a release of tension within him that he thought he would faint. But no sooner did he close his eyes than he was seized and he was struggling with three white men who were forcing his arms into some kind of coat. It was too much for him, his arms were pinned to his sides and as the pain blazed in his eyes, he realized that it was a straight-jacket. What filthy joke was this?

"That oughta hold him, Mister Graves," he heard.

His total energies seemed focused in his eyes as he searched their faces. That was Graves, the other two wore hospital uniforms. He was poised between two poles of fear and hate as he heard the one called Graves saying,

"He looks kinda purty in that there suit, boys. I'm glad you dropped by."

"This boy ain't crazy, Mister Graves," one of the others said. "He needs a doctor, not us. Don't see how you led us way out here anyway. It might be a joke to you, but your cousin Rudolph liable to kill somebody. White folks or niggers don't make no difference. . . ."

Todd saw the man turn red with anger. Graves looked down upon him, chuckling.

"This nigguh belongs in a straight-jacket, too, boys. I knowed that the minit Jeff's kid said something 'bout a nigguh flyer. You all know you cain't let the nigguh git up that high without his going crazy. The nigguh brain ain't built right for high altitudes. . . ."

Todd watched the drawling red face, feeling that all the unnamed horror and obscenities that he had ever imagined stood materialized before him.

"Let's git outta here," one of the attendants said.

Todd saw the other reach toward him, realizing for the first time that he lay upon a stretcher as he yelled,

"Don't put your hands on me!"

They drew back, surprised.

"What's that you say, nigguh?" asked Graves.

He did not answer and thought that Graves' foot was aimed at his head. It landed in his chest and he could hardly breathe. He coughed helplessly, seeing Graves' lips stretch taut over his yellow teeth and tried to shift his head. It was as though a half-dead fly was dragging slowly across his face and a bomb seemed to burst within him. Blasts of hot, hysterical laughter tore from his chest, causing his eyes to pop and he felt that the veins in his neck would surely burst. And then a part of him stood behind it all, watching the surprise in Graves' red face and his own hysteria. He thought he would never stop, he would laugh himself to death. It rang in his ears like Jefferson's laughter and he looked for him, centering his eyes desperately upon his face, as though somehow he had become his sole salvation in an insane world of outrage and humiliation. It brought a certain relief. He was suddenly aware that although his body was still contorted it was an echo that no longer rang in his ears. He heard Jefferson's voice with gratitude.

"Mister Graves, the Army done tole him not to leave his airplane."

"Nigguh, Army or no, you gittin' off my land! That airplane can stay 'cause it was paid for by taxpayers' money. But you gittin' off. An' dead or alive, it don't make no difference to me."

Todd was beyond it now, lost in a world of anguish.

"Jeff," Graves said, "you and Teddy come and grab holt. I want you to take this here black eagle over to that nigguh airfield and leave him."

Jefferson and the boy approached him silently. He looked away, realizing and doubting at once that only they could release him from his overpowering sense of isolation.

They bent for the stretcher. One of the attendants moved toward Teddy

"Think you can manage it, boy?"

"I think I can, suh," Teddy said.

"Well, you better go behind then, and let yo' pa go ahead so's to keep that leg elevated."

He saw the white men walking ahead as Jefferson and the boy carried him along in silence. Then they were pausing and he felt a hand wiping his face, then he was moving again. And it was as though he had been lifted out of his isolation, back into the world of men. A new current of communication flowed between the man and boy and himself. They moved him gently. Far away he heard a mocking-bird liquidly calling. He raised his eyes, seeing a buzzard poised unmoving in space. For a moment the whole afternoon seemed suspended and he waited for the horror to seize him again. Then like a song within his head he heard the boy's soft humming and saw the dark bird glide into the sun and glow like a bird of flaming gold.

ARTHUR MILLER

The Man Who Had All the Luck

THE CAST

DAVID FRIEBER
SHORY
J. B. FELLER
PATTERSON BEEVES
AMOS BEEVES
HESTER FALK
ANDREW FALK
DAN DIBBLE
GUSTAV EBERSON
AUGIE BELFAST
AUNT BELLE
HARRY BUCKS

SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene 1: April. In Shory's store.

Scene 2: Later that evening. In a bare barn, used by David as a shop.

ACT TWO

Scene 1: June. Three years later. The living-room of the Falk, now David's, house.

Scene 2: Later that day. A small bedroom-office in his house.

ACT THREE

The following March. The living-room at evening.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

A cold day. April. The interior of Shory's Grain, Feed & Cement Store in a small Middle Western town. At right, a door to the street with a glass pane in it. A window in the back wall, right of center, looking out on snow-covered land which now gives forth a faint glow in the night. At left, a phone hanging on the wall. Beside it another door leading to the back of the store, and downstage left a window looking out on a driveway which we cannot see. Running across the stage from the left wall to the distance of a few yards from the right wall is a counter of wood. On it a cash register. Hanging from the walls and ceiling are hoes, rakes and assorted farm implements, some of them covered with dust. The main function of this store is that of an office. Everything of value—feed and cement—is kept in a shed outside. The place is very old but not dilapidated. It is, rather, well used. A small pot-bellied stove near the window at the

Copyright, 1943, by Arthur Miller. Inquiries regarding all rights in this play should be addressed to the author's agent, Leland Hayward, Inc., 444 Madison Ave., New York City 22.

left casts a red glow of warmth and comfort over the place. Two bulbs hanging from the ceiling are the lighting.

ON THE RISE: *Shory* is sitting in his wheelchair by the stove. He is a man of thirty-eight but his age is hard to tell because of the absence of any hair on his body. He is totally bald, his beard does not grow, his eyebrows are gone. He sits comfortably, a dark green blanket covering his legs. His face is capable of great laughter and terrible sneers. He gives the impression of a very sharp, very thoughtful man. The curtain up a moment, several car horns are heard honking outside. *Shory* waits a moment for them to subside, then bangs his hands on the arms of the chair and pulls angrily to the door, right, pulls it open and yells out. . . .

SHORY: For Christ's sake, the man has only got two hands! Wait your turn! Dave, what're you lettin' them do that to you for. . . !

(Enter *David Frieber* in a hurry. He is a young man—actually twenty, but he looks quite a bit older. He is an intent person, rather quiet of movement. He is dressed in a mackinaw and colorless trousers, but all in all a neat, seemingly self-possessed young man, although at the moment his hands are dirty and he is sweating from working fast in heavy clothing.)

DAVID (Half explaining, half reprimanding): Hey, don't yell that way at them!

(Closing door.) They're customers, you don't insult customers. Take it easy.

(Goes behind the counter and searches in a drawer.)

SHORY (Rolling back to stove): A man who wants to be an auto mechanic has gotta have the utmost disdain for the human race. Treat a customer like a dog and he'll respect you. Otherwise . . . what're you after now?

DAVID (With a shade of apology; he stops searching): I dropped my pliers in the snow under Barry's car.

SHORY: When're you going to break down and buy yourself some tools? You're a mechanic, for God's sake—or are you?

DAVID (Picks a splinter of wood out of the counter): Everybody seems to think so . . . I guess I am.

(Looks at *Shory*) I don't know. Where are your pliers?

SHORY: In the bottom drawer.

(*David* disappears behind the counter.)

What're you working in the alley for? I gave you a barn to work in.

DAVID (Comes up with the pliers, tries them in his hands): Oh, it's six times colder in there than it is outside.

(He halts absently at the door and looks through the pane outside.) Didn't they ever heat it for the cattle?

SHORY: The guy I bought this place off never kept cattle . . . yes, he did too. No, he didn't either. Jesus, it's a long time I guess.

(Thinks.) I be damned if I remember him keeping cattle in there.

(Sees *David* standing motionless.) What's consuming you now?

DAVID: I saw Hester this morning.

(Slight pause. Turns to *Shory*.): I still can't understand it.

SHORY: What'd you decide?

DAVID (With a sense of mystery): While I was with her we didn't decide nothin', but . . .

SHORY: That's what I call a big development. When are you going to stop being a little boy?

DAVID (Protesting his own hurt): And when're you going to stop calling me a little boy! A joke is a joke, Shory, but that one's gone stale.

SHORY: So's your problem. There is always another woman you can fall in love with.

DAVID: What do you know? You never wanted to marry a woman.

SHORY (Non-committally): And that's a fact.

DAVID: Well, isn't it? Isn't it a fact?

SHORY: Change the subject. Is she still going away?

DAVID: Soon as she graduates in June she's goin' to Normal School for a teacher. The old man told her again last night. And he ain't kiddin' this time.

SHORY: Well, Normal's only seventy miles. Hop in the Ford. You'll have the week-ends.

DAVID: Week-ends! Jesus, Shory, we've been together since we were babies, practically; and now you want me to start seeing her week-ends! Oh God, why can't that old man keep his nose out of my business! I never asked him to butt in! You'd think an old man like that would stay home and. . . .

SHORY: An old man like that is her father.

DAVID: But she never wanted him buttin' in either. I never wanted to see him in my life!

SHORY: You're floatin' in a world of your own again, Davey. Andrew Falk isn't something in your mind. He's a fact, a fact six foot two inches tall. You been dreaming him out of existence for ten years but he's still standing a half a mile out there on his farm.

(Points upstage.) You'll have to deal with him, Davey, one way or another. Make up your mind.

(Pause.)

DAVID (As though for advice; with a sense of threat): Hester's comin' over here tonight, Shor'.

SHORY: Here? What for?

DAVID: The old man's been up in Burley all day. He'll be back around midnight. She wants us both to walk into his parlor together . . . and tell him off. I mean . . . tell him we're going to get married and Hester's not going to Normal.

SHORY: Well, that's one way. Good idea.

DAVID: There'll be a fight if I tell him that. I know that guy.

SHORY: Fight him then. You did it once, didn't kill you.

DAVID: That was no fight. I was only a kid then. He just beat me up. And ever since that night I can't stand the idea of touching that man. I just can't stand the idea of coming near him at all.

SHORY: Well, if he's got you scared, don't touch him.

DAVID: But then she'll have to go away. When I think of her going away I feel like I lost an arm. . . .

(He moves so as not to face *Shory.*) Geez, the whole thing's got me crazy all day.

(Turns to *Shory.*) Goddam, Shory, you're a smart guy, what'll I do?

SHORY: Davey, boy . . . six years, since the day you walked in here and said I want a job so I can marry my girl, six years you been askin' me "What'll I do, Shory?" And what's my answer? I only got one answer. A life isn't like a house that you can lay out on blue paper and say, a brick here on Tuesday and pipe here on Wednesday. Life is another word for what happens to you. Now you're living; take it, this is your life.

DAVID: But nothing happens to me. I quit school so I could have enough money to do it when she graduated. Now she's graduating and he's sending her away, and I'll never see her anymore. Where's the sense in it, Shory? Why did I work, why did I save, why did I quit school—where's the reason now!

SHORY: That same answer, Dave. I only got one. About what happens to him a man has got nothin' to say. . . .

DAVID: But you *got* to have something to say! What *good* is it otherwise!

SHORY (Pats his legs): This good.

DAVID (Stares at *Shory's* legs; quietly): I wish you wouldn't do like that any more. It stays with me after you do it. It even comes into my dreams.

(Horns blow outside. Involuntarily he moves toward door. Horns subside and he halts:) I'm going to follow her where she goes, Shory.

SHORY: You got a business here. Don't act your age. Be a man, Davey.

DAVID: Everything I ever did was so I could marry her. She's my best friend.

SHORY: This town's your best friend. I been around this country, Davey. If a man's got half a brain—and that's about what you got—he can make a nice little world for himself in a town small as this. You were born here, the houses know you, it's warm for you here.

DAVID (Stares down at pliers for a moment): I can't do without her, Shory. That's just a fact. I'll go the next couple of days. It's only April now. By the time she gets up there I'll have a job, be all set.

SHORY: Wait, Davey. Don't leave this town. You always done best by keeping your mouth shut, and waiting.

(*David* moves toward the door.)

You're not going to walk into his parlor tonight?

DAVID: I can't touch that man. I just can't do it.

SHORY: Then don't do nothin', Dave. Wait; join the human race and wait. To you that's almost a warning, boy.

DAVID (Looks at *Shory*): I've been waiting since the day I was born. . . .

(Enter *J. B. Feller,* a very fat man blowing like a horse. He is forty; a great gentleness, a fineness of feeling clings to him. He wears felt hat and heavy overcoat.)

J.B.: Fill 'em up, fill 'em up! The whole town's out there waitin' for alcohol!

(*David* goes out. *J.B.* calls out after him.) How are ya, Davey!

DAVID (From outside): Pretty good John!

J.B.: Good boy!

(Shuts the door, comes to stove.) April. What a laugh.

SHORY: You cold with all that fat on you?

J.B.: I got nerves in the fat too. I don't know why people have the idea that a fat man is always warm. What've you got to drink?

(Goes toward counter.)

SHORY: You finished it, you oughta know.

J.B.: Nothin' left?

(Comes back to stove.) Have to bring you over some more. Smooth stuff in that last case.

SHORY: Take a slug of Davey's alcohol.

J.B.: You want to kill me? That's for radiators.

SHORY: Well, Jesus, if it keeps a radiator from freezing it oughta work on you. Or will it by this time?

J.B. (Thoughtfully): I don't drink any more. Not like the old days. Really. Just a snifter when I come over here.

(Goes from stove to counter, leans on it.) Be nice if I could cut it out, though.

SHORY: Why do you keep making trouble for yourself? If she says lay off, lay off.

J.B. (Reaches behind the counter and lifts out a banjo. He plucks it idly): Complicated.

(He sets the banjo on the counter, losing the urge.) Things get so complicated.

(A slight animation takes hold of him.) If she'd let me keep it home I'd drink less. That's no lie. A man always yearns for something that's not around. I ain't locked out, though. I come for some alcohol for the car.

SHORY: Got some this morning, didn't you?

J.B. (Turns to banjo, plucks it once): Guess I did at that.

(Walks restlessly to left window, behind *Shory*.) What's this about Davey leaving town?

SHORY: Who told you that?

J.B. (Leans on counter): Hester's mother was in the store this afternoon. Says they're sending her off to Normal. Figured Davey'd never stay around here with Hester gone.

SHORY: Well? So what? You related to him or something?

J.B.: What are you peeved about now?

SHORY: It just gets me the way everybody's paying so much attention to that kid since his peanut stand out there started making a little money.

J.B.: I could buy his garage, your store and three blocks around it, Shory.

SHORY: I don't mean that—I mean—well, what the hell are you so interested in him for?

J.B. (Goes to window, looks out): Shory, he's the only boy I ever met who never makes a mistake.

(Slight pause.)

SHORY: Tell that to him and see what he says.

J.B.: I don't care what he says, I know what I see. Look at him out there. No father, no mother, no education, no nothin'. And yet, by Jesus, every time I set eyes on him something happens to me. I suddenly feel that everything is possible again. Isn't that crazy? I swear to you, Shory, I look at that boy and for some idiotic reason I feel sure for a minute that I'll . . . well, that I'll be a father before I die. Isn't that the wildest thing you ever heard?

SHORY: There's a certain kind of boy, J.B., and when he gets to be that age, a kind of a . . . well, it's like a sweet smell seems to hang on him . . . the smell of luck. I seen it before. Davey is one of that kind of boy. It's the smell of luck; it hangs on him like a coat.

J.B.: It just hurt me a little when I thought he might go away. When I was twenty—twenty-one, I was a dope, unconscious. And look at him out there. Even when he was a kid, roaming around town, eating in anybody's house, he looked up at you and you felt he was planning something, that he always knew his next move. I think sometimes if I'd a had a kid I'd want him just like Dave.

(Turns from window) Is he definitely going away?

SHORY: So he says. I guess he is.

J.B.: Just up and decided, huh? Well . . . there'll be nobody left in town I'll want to visit. It's crazy—a man my age.

SHORY: It's luck, J.B. The smell of it's got you. And the worst thing is, it's all in your mind.

J.B. (Softly, with some wonder): In my mind?

SHORY (Looks up at him): Nowhere else, fat man. Davey is not a lucky boy.

J.B.: . . . Why do you say that?

(Enter *Patterson Beeves* followed by his son *Amos. Amos* is twenty-one, a head taller than his father. A fresh-faced, rangy boy. *Patterson*, rather thin, and leaping with energy, seems, beside him, a very small man. *Amos* wears two sweaters. No hat. *Patterson* wears a hat and lumber jacket. *Amos* is squeezing a sponge rubber ball in his right hand.)

J.B.: Uh, oh. There he is.

PATTERSON (To *J.B.;* violently): You, standing by the fire in this weather! Don't you know, that's the first step to heart failure? Get away from that heat, for God's sake!

J.B. (Quietly, wryly, to *Amos*): The old man got a bottle on him?

AMOS (Laughs boorishly): Naa.

J.B. (As though *Pat* were not there): What the hell good is he?

PAT: Go ahead, Amos, tell him.

(Raising two fists.) I just went two rounds with Amos.

(To *J.B.*) Let's see *you* try that sometime.

J.B.: Why, you think I can't?

SHORY: Go on, fat stuff, give him the business.

J.B.: Let's go, boy, I'm all froze up.

(He spars toward *Amos.*)

AMOS: Oh, naa . . .

(Ill at ease, he waves fat man away.)

. . . I'm all tired out. We just run two mile.

SHORY: What're you tryin' to kill him, Pat? Runnin' two miles with that snow on the ground?

PAT: Kill him! Do you realize pacing is indispensable for the arches? A pitcher can have everything, but if his arches are not perfect? Zero!

AMOS: Squeezin' a rubber ball now.

(Holds up his hand.)

PAT: Ain't that an idea? We were trotting by. I thought you'd like to see it. That's the newest method.

J.B.: For the fingers, heh, Pat?

PAT (Almost indignantly—for joy): What has that got to do with the fingers? That's the old forearm. A pitcher can have everything—stance, balance, eye, but without a forearm? Zero!

(Enter *David* unraveling dollar bills from his pockets and starting to count them. He is absorbed in the money.)

PAT: Hullo boy!

(With a strange uneasiness and curiosity.) That the second million?

DAVID: Not quite. I'm just about bearin' down hard on the first hundred. Hullo, Ame, how's the old arm?

AMOS: Squeezin' a rubber ball now.

PAT: Thought of it this morning.

DAVID: Ya, looks like a swell arm-builder.

(To *Amos.*) Boy, I'm just waitin' for you to shut out the Orioles again. I'll never forget that game last year.

AMOS (With a trace of self-effacement): Yeh, I was ridin'. Had a good long arm that day. Gee, you make all that tonight?

PAT (As though injured by *Amos's* amazement): Why not? Once you master a skill you must expect money, big money. Davey is a skilled man, just like you. Am I right, Davey?

DAVID: Skill, hell. Anybody can pour alcohol down a radiator.

(To *Shory*): Sixteen bucks since five o'clock. Imagine that?

PAT (To *Shory*): I didn't know he carried alcohol.

SHORY: Salesman got to him yesterday when I wasn't lookin'. He got rooked.

DAVID: Well I sold every drop, Shor'. You can't deny that.

SHORY: You bought alcohol when the sun was shining hot as hell. You got rooked and don't go bein' a genius about it.

J.B. (To *Shory*): But look the way it froze up today.

SHORY: *He* didn't know it was going to freeze. The guy took him.

J.B.: Maybe he did know.

(To *David.*) Did you?

(Slight pause. They all look at *David.*)

DAVID: I really don't remember.

(Pause.) I was thinking of something else.

J.B.: You make up your mind about it?

DAVID: Guess I have, J.B.

PAT: Speaking of geniuses, most people don't know that there are two kinds; physical and mental. Take Christy Mathewson, now. Or Walter Johnson. There you have it in a nutshell. Am I right, J.B.?

SHORY: What've you got in a nutshell?

PAT (The beginnings of confusion tremble in him): Just what I said. People simply refuse to concentrate. You take Amos here. When I got back from the sea I come home and what do I find? An infant in his mother's arms. I felt his body and I saw it was strong. And I said to myself, this boy is not going to waste out his life being seventeen different things. He's going to stay on land and be a baseball player. And by God he did it!

DAVID (To *Amos*): You never wondered if you were supposed to be a ball player? I mean you were always sure, heh?

AMOS: Uh . . .

(Looks to his father.)

PAT (To *Dave*): How could he doubt what he is? Amos is practically recognized as the best up-and-coming young pitcher around.

(To all.) And why! Concentration! Throwin' against a target down the cel-

lar seven days a week, for twelve solid years—that's bound to have an effect. And don't you think they don't know it!
SHORY: Who knows it?
PAT (Caught): Who knows it? Plenty a people!
SHORY: Who, for instance?
PAT: Who for instance?
(Grasping.) The Detroit Tigers know it, how do you like that!

(*Amos* looks at him. Silence.)

J.B. (Turns from door through which he has been gazing): Pat . . . the Tigers called you?
PAT (Indignantly): Why, is that something to be surprised at, J.B.?
DAVID: Gosh, Ame. . . !
J.B.: Well, no, Pat, what're you getting sore about? What happened?
PAT: Nothing "happened." You people just seem to think that Amos is going to go through life pitching Sundays in the sand lots.
J.B.: Come on, Pat, what happened?
SHORY: You heard him. Nothing happened. That's what he came here to tell us.
DAVID (To *Shory*): Give him a chance to tell it, will ya!
PAT (Goes to door): Come home, Ame. When people know everything there's no use talking. After all . . .
SHORY: All right, all right, what happened? Get it out. Don't be such a virgin.
PAT (Turning quickly. He shouts): I don't like everybody's attitude! It's still winter! Can he play in the winter?
J.B. (Softly, placating): Why, nobody said he should be playing . . .
PAT: You don't have to say it. I know.
(Indignantly explaining.) Pitching is his business; it's a regular business like . . . like running a store, or being a mechanic or anything else. And it happens that in the winter there's nothing to do in his business but sit home and wait!
J.B. (Quietly, trying to help him out of it): Well yeh, Pat, that's just what he ought to be doing.
PAT: Then why does everybody look at him as though . . . ?

(He raises his hand to his head utterly confused and ashamed for his outburst.)

J.B. (Goes to him and holds his arm): What the hell is eating you? Nobody looks at Amos as though anything.
AMOS (Raising right arm with the ball): It hurts, Dad. . . .
PAT (Runs to him with alarm): Are you still squeezing that!
(Rips the ball out of his hand.) I told you just for twenty minutes!
AMOS: But Dad, you told me. . . .

(*Shory* bursts out laughing while *Pat* feels *Amos'* arm.)

PAT (Pointing violently to door): Start trotting home this minute!
AMOS (Frightened, and military): Right, Dad.

(He rushes out.)

PAT (Looking toward where *Amos* disappeared): I can't understand it. Every paper in the county calls him a phenomenon.
(Turns to all.) Undefeated. He's ready for the Leagues. Been ready for three years. Who can explain a thing like that?
DAVID: Why don't you try this, Pat? How about calling Detroit? The Tigers.

PAT: Calling? You mean on the telephone?

J.B.: That's an idea. Simple and direct.

PAT (To *David*): I don't know if it's dignified. He's so great, they ought to just *send* somebody . . . I mean, *naturally.*

DAVID: Yeh, but you been waiting so many years . . . it might be you'll wait and wait and just nothin'll *ever* happen.

SHORY: You wait, Pat. What's going to happen, will happen. You can't hurry things.

DAVID (To *Shory*): But a person can't just wait all his life!

(To *Pat* and *J.B.*) That gets me. I can't make up my mind about it. When I was still in school, for instance, all the kids started comin' around saying they were going off to the U. of P. or West Point or just gonna be a farmer, or anything. And nobody ever told me what I was supposed to be, you know? I thought if I just waited, somebody or something would tell me what I was supposed to be, where I was supposed to go next. But nobody ever did. And now I keep wondering, should I have quit? I mean, is this what I'm supposed to be? That's why I think, Pat, that . . . well, I don't know, maybe you ought to wait, . . . maybe a scout'll just naturally come. Then again maybe they're just *waitin'* for you to call.

PAT: What would you do, Dave? Wait?

DAVID: I guess I'd . . . wait, yeh. No, then again, I believe I'd call after all this time. I'd call, Pat . . . Jesus, I don't know.

J.B. (To *Pat*): Why don't you call, Pat?

PAT (Thinks): I can't. It's not dignified. I always thought of it happening . . . *naturally* . . . you know, that it would kinda like . . . grow, and then just happen. I . . . I can't call them.

(He goes to the door, turns.) I didn't mean to get sore. I just can't stand people who disregard facts. Facts are holy. Dave has his trade, Amos has his. Two trades, am I right, Dave?

DAVID: Except that Amos'll probably end up with a million.

PAT (Gratified and suddenly proud; with a little toss of his head): Well . . .

(A slight laugh.) . . . that's the way it goes y'know.

(*Patterson* goes out.)

DAVID (Stands a moment playing wonderingly with the money in his hands): Sixteen bucks since five o'clock. And what'd I do? Poured alcohol out of a barrel.

(Goes to window at back, right, and looks out.) What time is it getting to be?

J.B.: Look here, Dave. If you think it'd do any good for me to go over and have a talk with old man Falk. . . .

DAVID (Turns quickly, alarmed and embarrassed): Oh no, no, I'll . . . I'll tend to everything. . . .

(Phone hanging on left wall rings.)

(*David* starts at the sound, looks fearfully across stage at the phone.)

(Phone rings.)

SHORY: You going to answer the damn thing or aren't you?

DAVID (Turns to *J.B.* and points at phone): If it's old man Falk. . . .

SHORY: Old man Falk's up in Burley tonight. Answer it, will ya?

(*David* goes to phone.)

DAVID (In phone): Hullo. Ya?

(Relieved.) Ya, he's here.

(Enter *Aunt Belle* carrying a shopping bag. She is a small, inept woman of fifty. Her clothes are somber and ill fitting. A kerchief grows out of her hand. Her nose is sore and red.) For you, J.B. Your wife.

J.B. (Mystified and apprehensive): My wife?

(He goes to phone, talks quietly facing upstage.)

AUNT BELLE (Lifts a pair of galoshes out of the bag. With stupid sweetness): It's threatening snow.

DAVID: Oh, Belle, why do you always follow me around with those things!

(He goes back to window, looks out.)

AUNT BELLE: You'll catch your death with wet feet. You always did catch cold with wet feet. . . .

DAVID (Turning to her): Please, I told you a hundred times, I can take care of myself. Go home, will you?

AUNT BELLE: All right, you can drink this milk then.

(Takes tin container from bag.) It's just nice and warm. . . .

SHORY: Go away, Belle. He's got to be a man tonight. Anyway, you smell funny.

DAVID (To *Shory*): You leave her alone. . . .

BELLE (To *David*): Do I smell funny?

DAVID: It's just the way you always smelled. Go home, please. I'll be home soon.

BELLE: All right, you be home soon. I'll make you some chocolate . . . will you remind me?

DAVID: I've got more to do than remind you to make me chocolate! When are you going to remember something! Gosh, Belle . . .

(Apologetically.) I wish you wouldn't follow me around. Where's your watch, Shory!

BELLE (To *Shory*, thoughtfully, touching her red nose): I think it's from blowing my nose. I always forget what he tells me. . . .

(Enter *Hester Falk*. She closes the door behind her, looks through the pane a moment, then turns to *David*. She is *David's* age. She bears a natural healthy gentility, almost a fragile quality, that is perfectly honest.)

You see? Hester wears her overshoes.

(She proceeds to pack her bag.)

DAVID (Softly): Hullo, Hess.

(She is breathing at the top of her lungs, not from running but from expectation. She glances toward *J.B.*, *Shory*. . . .)

(Reaching toward hook where his coat hangs.) We could go out for a walk . . . all right?

HESTER (Quietly): Walk? He'll be home soon.

(Slight pause.) Aren't you coming home with me?

AUNT BELLE (To *David*): You mustn't go to Falk's house, he told you never to go. . . .

(*J.B.* hangs up phone and stands watching.)

HESTER: But we're going to be married, Belle. Aren't we, Davey?

(*David* stands in pained speechlessness.)

AUNT BELLE: Married!

(To both): But you're only babies . . .

(To *David.*) Are you old enough, Davey?

DAVID (Staring at *Hester*): Go home, Aunt Belle.

AUNT BELLE (To *Hester,* with rising anxiety): But he can't, his father's been dead only . . .

(Stops.) . . . Oh dear, it is a long time, isn't it.

(To *David*; wonderingly) You . . . you must be almost nineteen, Davey.

DAVID (With finality): I'm not a baby any more, don't you understand? Go home, will you?

AUNT BELLE (Stands shocked, as though by a revelation; to *Hester*): Hadn't I better cook for him anyway?

HESTER: You can help me, but . . . I'll be his wife, don't you understand?

(Recalling.) Weren't you married once, Belle?

BELLE: I was going to be engaged when I came to work for his mother, but . . .

(Her kerchief comes to her nose.) I . . . I never felt old enough. Oh dear. . .

(She begins to cry, and pulls the door open and hurries out violently blowing her nose.)

HESTER (Her insistence is childlike, and yet there is about it a profound sense of his position): Shouldn't we better start, Davey?

DAVID: Hess, I . . . I been thinkin'.

HESTER (A smile breaks out on her face; despite those in the room she goes toward him): I was hoping all day you'd figure some way of tellin' him.

DAVID: I got it all figured out. In a few days I'll close up here and go to Normal. And by the time summer's over and you get there I'll be all set in some kinda work, and. . . .

HESTER: But you kinda said we'd have it all finished tonight. We always planned, that when I graduated. . . .

DAVID: I know, Hess, but he'll only go wild, you know he'll go wild when we tell him.

HESTER: But we always knew that, Davey. Didn't we always know we'd have to tell him?

DAVID: Yeh, but . . . not really, Hess. I guess I always believed things would change when we got to the time for it. I can't touch him, Hess . . . I better go to Normal, and in the Fall you meet me there. That's the only way. I can come down here for week-ends all summer.

HESTER: But I'm not going to Normal.

DAVID: Where then?

HESTER: Momma just told me he went to Burley today to arrange for me to go to school near Chicago.

DAVID: Chicago! But that's six hundred miles!

HESTER: All my cousins go there. He thought of it this morning, Momma said.

(*David* stares at her. She comes closer to him.) He'll be home right away. Be nice if we could be sittin' there talkin' to Momma when he comes in.

(*David* does not answer.)

I don't want to go to school any more, Davey . . . I . . . I feel too old for school any more.

(Pause. Softly.) Come?

DAVID (Doubtfully): I *could* get a job in Chicago. . . .

J.B.: What for?

(Comes down toward them.) You're standing on a gold mine, Dave.

DAVID (Laughs weakly): This place?

J.B. (Portentously): Listen, boy, that was Dan Dibble on the phone.

SHORY: You mean from Burley?

J.B.: From Burley, yeh.

(To *David*.) How'd you like to work on a seven-passenger Marmon, Dave?

DAVID (Catching the fat man's anticipation): Never saw a Marmon around here, that's a city car. . . .

J.B.: Listen. Dan Dibble is my brother-in-law. He's got twenty-one hundred acres and better than half the cows in the Burley district.

(Holds hand belly-high.) He's this big, but solid gold and not a brain in his head. . . .

DAVID (Smiles in amazement): First time I ever heard of a farmer buyin' a Marmon . . . !

J.B.: The Marmon's only the beginning. He's a bachelor with a fourteen-room house; got two vacuum cleaners and never used nothin' but a broom. Last time I was out there he had two extra tractors that he never took the wrappings off of, and a radio in every room. He had 'em a year before I told him how to connect them. . . .

DAVID: What is he, crazy?

J.B.: He's on the wife's side. . . .

(Wryly to *Hester*.) Let that one die here, honey.

(*Hester* laughs at the "scandalousness.")

(To *David*.) The man is just a sucker for anything mechanical. He'll buy two of any gadget and never find out how to work 'em. Here's the point. . . .

DAVID: What year Marmon is it?

J.B.: She's seven months old and he scrubs her every night like she was a horse. He ain't put five hundred miles on her; he come down this way for a funeral—it's the only time he uses the Marmon. Anyway, she ain't hittin'; he probably dropped a scrubbing brush in the fan belt or something. What do you say?

DAVID: I never worked on a Marmon —what's he think is wrong with her?

SHORY: Mechanics don't ask a question like that, you dope.

DAVID (Annoyed; to *Shory*): But that's a big job, that Marmon, you got to know your engines . . .

(To *J.B.*) I mean I don't want to start anything I can't finish.

HESTER (Softly urging): But you always finished the cars, Davey!

DAVID (As softly): But Hess, that ain't a Chevvy or a Model T. . . .

J.B.: You don't get me, Dave. . . .

DAVID: I get you, it's just that I. . . .

J.B.: You *don't* get me. This isn't just another job. If you clean up Dan's Marmon you're opening the door to the biggest tractor farms in the state. They all follow Dan because he makes money, and they'll follow him down here. It's none of my business, I guess, but I think I know a tremendous thing when I see one.

(*David* stands wide-eyed, looking at no one.)

HESTER (Softly): Why don't you take it, Davey?

DAVID (Faces *Hester*): What if it works out like he says? I'll never get away from here . . . and you in Chicago. . . .

HESTER: Come home now then. We'll have it out now.

(She stands close to him but they do not touch.) Oh, Davey, it's like everything we wanted . . . only a real business maybe, and everything.

(She takes his hand.) Come on, tell him, Davey.

(He does not move.)

Come, will you?

J.B.: Go ahead. It's time you brought that old fool down to size.

(*David* slowly turns his head toward *Shory*.)

SHORY: What're you lookin' at me for? You know my answer.

(Outside a car is heard pulling up.)

DAVID: What?

SHORY: Wait. Don't make trouble for yourself. Wait. It'll all work itself out.

HESTER: Don't listen to him, Davey, we could wait forever!

(She draws his arm.) Why do you listen to him! Things aren't just going *to happen!*

DAVID: Look, Hess. Maybe if. . . .

(Enter *Andrew Falk*, a tall, old man, hard as iron, near-sighted, slightly stooped. Sound of idling motor outside.)

J.B. (Quickly): I'll be right back, Dave. I'll bring Dan over and the Marmon, O. K.?

DAVID (Affecting a careless, businesslike air): Sure, J.B., I'll fix him up.

(*J.B.* goes, *David* calling) Thanks, loads, John!

(He shuts the door. *Falk* has been standing looking at *Hester*, who looks down at the floor.)

Evening, Mr. Falk. Have a chair?

(*Falk* turns deliberately, looks wordlessly at *David*.)

DAVID: You left your engine running. Stay a while. Let me shut it off.

FALK: You willin' to push it?

DAVID: Oh, battery run down?

FALK (Caustically): Well, I don't know what else would prevent her from starting.

(Glares at *David* with contempt for a moment, turns to *Hester*.) I'll see you home. Go on.

(*Hester* looks toward *David* for a countering word.)

DAVID: I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Falk. I meant to see you earlier. We could all go in the back. . . .

(Points left.)

FALK: (In reply): Go on home, Hester.

DAVID (With a swipe at indignation): I'd like her to be here for a minute.

FALK (In reply, goes to *Hester*, takes her arm gently but firmly and leads her to the door): I'll be home right away.

(*Falk* opens the door and presses her relentlessly toward it. She digs in on the threshold and grasps his sleeve.)

HESTER: Daddy, can't I stay? Can't we talk quiet and sensible? Let me. I've got to stay!

FALK: I'll talk to you home.

(He forces her out, closes door behind her. With the deliberate slowness of his size and age he turns to *David*.)

DAVID (Quietly): That ain't going to work any more, Mr. Falk. We're old enough now.

FALK: This is the last time I'm ever goin' to talk to you, Frieber. Now listen to me. You. . . .

DAVID: Why is it you're the only man who hates me like this? Everybody else thinks. . . .

FALK: Nobody but me knows what you are.

SHORY: What is he? What're you blowin' off about?

FALK (Pointing at *Shory*): The good God gave you your answer long ago! Keep your black tongue in your head when I'm here!

SHORY (to *David*): His brains are swimmin', don't you see? What're you bothering with him for!

FALK (Roars at *Shory,* taking a stride toward him with fists stiffening): Shut up, you . . . you whoremonger!

SHORY: You don't scare me, Falk. You been dead twenty years, why don't you bury yourself?

(*Falk,* strangely, relaxes, walks away from *Shory,* raising his shoulder to rub his chin on his coat collar, his eyes blinking furiously in thought. The motor outside stalls. His head cocks toward the right door.)

DAVID (Points outside): You stalled. I'll start her up for you.

FALK: Don't touch anything I own.

(*David* stops moving.)

What were you doin' to her that night I caught you by the river? You got backbone enough to tell me that?

DAVID: We were kids, we were babies . . . I didn't like to sit home with only Aunt Belle there. She never said nothin', never told me any stories or anything kids like to hear. So I'd go find Hester and we'd tell stories . . . and just talk, that's all.

FALK: You never come and ask me if she could walk with you. You come sneakin' every time, like a rat through the fences. . . .

DAVID: How could I talk to you? You never once smiled, you were so big, you made me afraid. And Hester was always scared of you . . . I got it from her, I guess. . . .

FALK: You're scared of me now too, and you know why, Frieber.

DAVID (Softly): . . . I don't, I don't know why.

FALK: Nobody but me knows what you are.

(Slight pause.)

DAVID (Quietly): What am I?

FALK: You're a lost soul, you're a lost man. The first time I looked in your eyes I saw it. Other boys knew when it was time to play and time to go home, time for work and time for church. You don't know the nights I've watched you sittin' on the river ice fishin' through a hole—alone, alone like an old man with a boy's face. Or makin' you a fire in Keldon's woods where nobody could see. And that Sunday night you nearly burned down the church. . . .

DAVID: I was nowhere near the church that night!

FALK: It couldn't've been nobody else but you! I watched you a hundred times sittin' alone by a hundred little fires. When the church burned they never was a sign from God that was so clear.

(Silence): The man Hester marries is goin' to know what he's about. He's goin' to be a steady man that I can trust with what I made in this world. He's goin' to know his God, he's goin' to know where he came from and where he's goin'. You ain't that man.

(He turns to door.)

DAVID (Level): I'm going to marry Hester. We're going to live like we want to.

FALK (Stops moving): Frieber, if you ever step onto my land I'll put a bullet through you, may God write my words, I'll shoot you dead. I don't fool, Frieber, don't go near her again. I'm old enough to know what I'll do.

(Points to *Shory*.) No man who could find a friend in this lump of corruption is going to live in my daughter's house!

(He opens door and hesitates, looking out. *David* starts doubtfully toward door, looking over *Falk's* shoulder at car outside.)

SHORY: Don't be a damn fool! Let him start it himself!

(*David* starts to turn in protest to *Shory*. *Falk* hurries out. *David* walks to door, stops.)

DAVID (Frantically): Shory, what can I tell him? There must be something I can say to him!

SHORY (Rolls angrily across to door): Get the hell away from that door!

(Yelling to *Falk* outside) That's it, Grandpa, push, push it, that's it, harder, go ahead, harder! It's only a half a mile, push!

(Laughs wildly, mockingly.)

DAVID (Pulls him from the door, and shouts into his face): Are you crazy! He'll never talk to me now!

(Slams door. Shouts in a rage.) Goddamnit, Shory!

SHORY: What're you, dreamin' again? Didn't you hear what he said? You're finished with him! You're done, you're on your ass, you damn fool!

DAVID (His hands come up to his head. He is almost weeping. Softly): Why? Why did it have to be this way? Why couldn't he have been a . . . a decent guy . . . like J.B. maybe? Who brought him into it? I don't see why he's in it. The whole thing is between me and Hester. *What is he doing in my life!*

SHORY: Go! Take her, slap a ring on her finger and to hell with that old bastard!

(Pause.)

DAVID (With a strange, deep horror masked in indignation): She won't do it without him. He's got her buffaloed . . . and why did that have to be? I don't understand it, Shory . . . I've lived my whole life waiting for that girl; whatever happened to me I always knew I'd have that girl. The time I found out Aunt Belle wasn't my aunt but a stupid maid, when they told me my father wasn't ever coming home, when the women used to put me out of the houses so their kids could do homework, when I'd walk by the river alone in the middle of the night, only one thing I could touch and say it was mine, and say it sure—that girl.

(Pause.) Shory, you mean to say I did all that worrying, and all that dreamin', and all that workin' . . . for nothing? Is it possible, Shory? Can so much be wasted for a stupid reason like this?—for no reason at all?

SHORY (With some tenderness): Davey, listen this time, and learn it for good, will ya? Stop pulling the strings out of yourself. I left this town with a beautiful moustache and a big head of hair. Women traveled half this state to get into my bed. Why did I go to France, to come back like this? In my mind was no broken bones and a chair with wheels—I never put that in my plans. Even over there under shot and shell, as they say, I was sure there was a special star over my head—I was the only guy nothin' ever hit. I walked into Paris combing my hair, the women were watching me from both sides of the street. I walked up a stairs with the whistles blowin' out the Armistice. I remember her taking off my shoes. And the next thing I knew the house was laying on my chest and they were digging me out.

DAVID: I thought . . . everybody said it was a battle. . . .

SHORY: No battle. I could understand it happening in battle. Eight months in one hole, a man expects that.

DAVID: Well, how'd it happen?

SHORY: Laugh. I picked out the one house in Paris . . . the janitor was getting drunk on the Armistice . . . he forgot to put water in the furnace boiler. The walls blew out.

(He sits looking up into *David's* eyes.) I'm not talkin' out of a book. A man is a jellyfish laying on the beach. A wave comes along and pulls him back into the sea, and he floats a while on a million currents he can't even feel, and he's back on the beach again never knowing why. When you can cover the moon with an overcoat you can control the tides, until then take my advice. Forget the girl, Davey. There's three or four others in the world you can fall in love with. You got a trade, a place to sleep. Take a deep breath and start living like you were born today. Can't you forget the girl?

(Pause.)

DAVID (Stands staring at the floor): Shory. . . .

(He bangs on the counter with each word.) I can't understand *why!*

(Door swings open and *J.B.* comes in excitedly.)

J.B. (To both; his thumb pointing over his shoulder): Where's the Marmon?

(Looks around.) Where's Dan?

DAVID: Nobody came here. Didn't you follow him?

J.B.: I ran into a little conversation with the wife. He left, saying he'd meet me here. That's my brother-in-law. A quarter of a mile and he gets lost!

DAVID: Maybe he broke down on the road. He could've skidded, there's ice under that snow.

SHORY (To *David*): He would have seen the car on the road, wouldn't he?

J.B.: Say! I bet he took 31 (Points upstage direction) instead of the spur. That's right, the spur wasn't open last time he was here. I better go back up 31 for him.

(Hurries to door, turns quickly.) Before I forget, Dave; charge him plenty . . . a hundred dollars.

DAVID: *A hundred dollars!*

J.B.: There's a whole story. . . . Just do what I tell you. Charge him to the hilt. This thing'll be the making of you! Play it right!

DAVID: But God almighty, there's no job I can *do* worth a hundred dollars! Say, what's *wrong* with that car?

J.B.: Let me find him, will ya! I'll explain everything.

(He opens the door, starts through it. Outside a motor is heard and a car door slamming. Motor shuts off.)

DAVID (Going to door): Hey, wait a minute, J.B., I ain't sure I want that job!

(*J.B.* and *David* stop moving at what they see coming toward them outside. *J.B.* steps back into the store. *Hester* comes in. She is on the edge of hysteria. She flies to *David* and bursts into sobs in his arms.) Don't cry, Hess, there's a way, there must be a way. . . .

(Enter *Dan Dibble,* a very small man wearing an old-fashioned peaked flannel cap. His hands are clasped together, his body seems to be on the verge of shrinking with distress.)

DAN: God help me, God in heaven help me. . . .

(Going prayerfully to *Hester* who continues sobbing helplessly. *David* is unconsciously smoothing her hair and muttering "Hess, please, what. . . ?")

(To *Hester,* keeping a fearful and respectful distance from her.) I couldn't see him, Miss, I swear to you I couldn't see him. How could I see him, the car had no lights . . . ?

(He covers his face and weeps.) Oh, God help me, I didn't see him. . . .

DAVID (Starkly as it dawns on him, to *Dan*): What happened? What did you do!

J.B.: Dan . . .

(Goes to *Dibble* and pulls his hands away from his face): . . . stop that. For God's sake, what happened?

DAN: John, I killed a man: This girl's father, an old man . . . I couldn't see him, he was pushing a car without lights . . . He walked out from behind just as I came on him!

(*J.B.* stares at *David. Dan* looks helplessly from one to the other, whimpering questioningly. Slowly *David's* arms drop from *Hester's* shoulders. She stands with her face buried in her hands, sobbing softly. *David* comes as though entranced to *Dan.*)

DAVID: Where is he now?

DAN: I took him into his house. It happened a few feet from his house. He came out from behind the car, you see? I think he wanted to turn his wheels into his driveway . . . it's pitch dark there. . . . I didn't know what to do with his wife . . . the girl told me to come here . . . she. . . .

(He loses speech at the sight of *David's* dumbfounded face.)

(Slight pause.)

J.B.: Come on, Dan, get in my car.

(*J.B.* motions him out)

DAN (Moving tremblingly toward him): John, it wasn't my fault. . . .

J.B. (Angrily): Come away from here, will you!

(He takes *Dan's* arm and pulls him out. *David* starts to follow him.)

SHORY (Rolls swiftly into *David's* path): He's dead!
DAVID (Raises his hand indeterminately upstage toward the Falk house): But. . . .
SHORY (Looking up into his face): It's no dream. He's dead.
(Pause) Gone.
DAVID (Turns slowly to *Hester*, whose back is turned): You want to go home, Hess?

(Without turning *Hester* shakes her head.)

(*David* walks slowly to the door, halts and turns toward her across the stage.)

DAVID (As though dazed): I offered to help him. He wouldn't let me, Hess. He said, "Don't touch anything I own."

(Slight pause.)

(A faint, short breath of sardonic yet sympathetic laughter escapes his throat. *Hester* turns to him. They look at each other, he with a deep wonder. She—now walking to him with apparent resolve.)

HESTER: He doesn't own anything now . . . nothing at all.
DAVID (Very quietly—as though to himself): Yeh. . . .
(He takes her hand.) . . . But he lost it so fast, and for such a dumb, unnecessary reason, that I almost feel I lost it with him.
HESTER: I can't cry when I'm not really sad enough . . . you don't know how he hated us, you can't imagine what he's said to me!
DAVID: It ain't that I'm sad, Hess . . .
(He smooths his face on her hand, and drops it, goes toward door.) I'm just. . . .
SHORY: Stop wondering. Every day the tide comes up and throws jelly-fish onto the beach . . . and a wave pulls them back into the sea . . .
DAVID (Nods): Yeh, I guess so.
(To *Hester*.) I'll be right back, I want some air.

(He goes out. *Hester* stands watching him through the door.)

HESTER (Turns slowly to *Shory*. He meets her gaze): I wish you wouldn't talk that way to him any more.
SHORY: What way?
HESTER: You're always trying to make him . . . like you are. . . . Inside, I mean. Davey can do anything he puts his mind to, anything in the world.
SHORY: Here's hopin'. But don't push him too hard, Hester. . . .
HESTER: It makes him proud when I tell him I want nice things. I could live anywhere, in a tent . . . but that's when he laughs, when I tell him I want things. . . .
SHORY: All right, honey, but don't push him. You got a long life ahead; teach him to lose easily. You understand? He'll smile all the time.
HESTER (Quietly): . . . Now I understand. . . .
SHORY: What, Baby?
HESTER (Inwardly backing from him): Why I was always afraid of you . . . I thought it was the way you looked, but it isn't!

(She turns quickly and starts toward the door with a deep inner fear.)

SHORY (Laughing; calling): Hey, what're you afraid of! Hester . . . !

(As she opens the door, *David* comes in.)

DAVID: I better start on that Marmon now, it's. . . .

(The anxiety in *Hester's* face stops him. He looks to *Shory* whose beckoning hand is lowering to the chair arm.) . . . What were you talking about?

SHORY (Laughs slightly): Nothing. I was just tellin' her . . . not to be afraid.

(*David* looks at *Shory* with troubled understanding, *Hester* watching his face, as . . .)

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

The following morning, two hours before dawn.

This is the interior of *Shory's* barn which *David* uses as a shop. All barn fixtures have been stripped from the place, leaving merely the four walls and roof intact. We see only the back wall, and that dimly, for the only light is coming from a work lamp lying on the floor. The back of the barn is offstage left and the big entrance doors are offstage right. The only building fixture is a work-bench set against the back wall. Tools hang over it, and junk of all kinds upon it.

David is lying under the front end of the Marmon. The car is set at an angle to us, so that with the hood off, as it is now, we can see only a corner of the engine. The car beyond the windshield is not visible. Beside it the hood stands on end. *David,* with the one light near his head, is hurriedly tightening a nut on the pan under the engine. He slides out, springs to his feet, and wiping his hands, trots around the car and gets in. A starter is heard, then an engine. *David* leaps out and stands over the motor, his whole body expectant. The engine sound is irregular. After a moment, *David* seems to collapse within. He goes slowly to the front door of the car, comes back thoughtfully and stands over it. His hand comes up and he pulls his lip, his eyes staring at the engine. After a moment he picks a screw driver from the tools on the floor, is about to turn something on the engine, and as though realizing he is kidding himself, drops his hands. He sets the screw driver on the fender, and it rolls with a clatter to the floor. He kicks it furiously, and walks about pulling his lip, whispered imprecations coming from his throat. At last he sits on the bumper of the car. His breath seems to be coming faster and faster and his eyes stare as though at a terrible vision. A soft knock from offstage right is heard. He starts, gets to his feet and peers through the darkness.

DAVID: Who's that? Oh, Hester . . .

HESTER (She comes out of the darkness at right): I can't sleep. Aren't you finished yet?

DAVID (Glancing at the car): A . . . a little while yet. A couple of things. What time is it?

HESTER: About four. Can I sit and watch you? I just can't get to sleep.

DAVID: It's pretty cold in here. You better go home, you'll catch cold.

HESTER (She goes to him, takes his face in her hands and kisses him): You didn't kiss me yet.
DAVID (With growing ill-ease): Please, Hess, I gotta figure something out here. I wish . . . I wish you'd leave me alone for a while.
HESTER (With quiet astonishment—and compassion): Haven't you figured it out yet?
DAVE: Oh, I got it just about, but not. . . .

(Stops.)

Hess, please leave me alone.

(He walks from her and pretends to study the engine.)

HESTER: Davey.
DAVID: Ya?
HESTER: You're *going* to be able to fix it, aren't you?
DAVID: Don't you think I can?
HESTER: I know you can.
DAVID: Then why do you ask me?
HESTER: Because . . . the Burley garage they didn't know how to fix it.
DAVID: (He stands straight. Slight pause): How do you know?
HESTER: *J.B.* told me. He's going to tell you in the morning after you're finished. He didn't want to scare you about it.
DAVID: (With growing fear): That can't be. They got regular trained mechanics in the Burley garage.
HESTER: But it's true. Mr. Dibble said they wanted to take the whole thing apart and charge him a hundred and fifty dollars, and he wouldn't let them because. . . .
DAVID: (Comes to her anxiously): Why'd they want to take the whole thing apart?
HESTER: (Seeing his bewilderment clearer): Well, I don't know, Davey . . .
DAVID: Well, what'd they tell him was wrong? Don't you remember. . . ?
HESTER (Her sobs threatening): Well, Davey, don't shout at me that way, I don't know anything about cars . . .

(She begins to cry.)

DAVID (With the pain of guilt): Oh, Hester, don't cry, please. I'll fix it, I'll find out what the matter is. Please, stop it, will you?

(The pain it causes him makes him turn and almost march to the car.)

(On the point of weeping himself.) I never *heard* an engine make that sound. I took the pan off, I took the head off, I looked at the valves; I just don't know what it is, Hess! It's turning off center somewhere and I can't find it, I can't!
HESTER (Her sobbing vanishes as she senses his loss): That's all right, Davey, it'll be all right. Maybe you better go to bed. You look so tired. . . . It really doesn't matter so much.
DAVID (She growing taller upon his guilt): Gosh, Hess . . . there never was a girl like you.

(He goes to her and kisses her.)

I swear there never was.
HESTER: Don't ever try for anything I want, if it worries you too much to get it, Davey.
DAVID (He kisses her cheek. With swift resolution): You go home, go to bed, sleep. I'll find out what's the matter. I'll do it! You go.
HESTER (All joy): All right, Davey, 'cause J. B. was telling Mr. Dibble such

great things about you. . . . He's got a marvelous thing to tell you in the morning.

DAVID: What?

HESTER: I can't tell you till you finish. . . .

DAVID: Please, Hess, what'd he say?

HESTER: No, fix it first. (Pause): J. B. wants to tell you himself. He made me promise. Good-night.

DAVID: Good-night, Hess.

HESS (Going and waving): And don't worry . . . about anything.

DAVID: . . . No . . .

(He watches her go, then turns to car, goes and stands over it, tapping his nose with his finger thoughtfully. Then lightly punching his fist into his palm in a heartbeat rhythm, faster, then faster . . . then. . . .)

(Bursting out in loud whisper) God damn!

(The sound of a man walking into the shop rather slowly from offstage right is heard. *David* turns toward the sound and stands still watching. *Gustav Eberson* enters. He is a strong man. His suit is pressed but too small for him. He wears a white shirt. A plain brown overcoat. He is smiling warmly, but with the manner of an intruder. *David* says nothing as he approaches.)

GUS (A slight German accent): Excuse me, are you Mr. Frieber?

DAVID: Yeh, that's my name.

(Slight pause): What's yours?

GUS: Eberson . . . Gustav Eberson. . . . (With an apologetic nod and smile.) Are you very busy? I could, of course, come back.

(The German's self-effacement is curious.)

DAVID: Yeh, I'm busy . . . but what can I do for you?

GUS: I have just finished moving into town and I thought we ought to know each other.

DAVID (Taken aback . . .): I'm glad to know you. I didn't know anybody was moving into town.

GUS: Well, I suppose I moved in quite . . . invisibly; I don't have very much to move. I am opening a repair garage on the other end of the avenue.

(Waves downstage): Away down.

DAVID: Repair garage? You mean to repair cars?

GUS (Quickly): I came to explain that I. . . .

DAVID (Surprising himself he laughs and extends his hand. They shake): Oh, well, that's fine, lots of luck!

GUS (Earnestly, worriedly): I want to assure you, Mr. Frieber, that if I didn't think there is plenty of business here for both of us I would never set up a place in this town.

DAVID (A faint tightness cramps his voice): Oh, there's plenty of business for two here. Plenty! Where is your shop?

GUS: Over there on Poplar Street, right next to the grocery store.

DAVID: Oh, that place. Gosh, nobody's been in that building for years. We used to say it was haunted.

GUS: Maybe it is!

(Laughs lightly at himself): I have very little machinery. As a matter of fact. . . .

(Quite happily): . . . I have very little money too. So possibly I will not be troubling you so very long.

DAVID (With emphatic assurance): Oh, you'll make out all right.

(Vaguely indicates the shop): There's nothin' to it. You come from around here?

GUS: No, I am from Detroit.

(Slight pause.)

DAVID (Quietly): What were you doing in Detroit?

GUS: I was with the Ford Company, the River Rouge plant, for several years. This last year and four months I was by the Hudson Motor people.

DAVID (Breathlessly): Well . . . I guess you oughta know your stuff, huh?

GUS (Sensing. . . .): What is there to know? You are probably much better as I am!

DAVID: No, that's all right, I just meant. . . .

GUS: I am not in the world to become rich. I was doing very well in Detroit.

DAVID: Then why'd you come here?

GUS: It is my nature. I cannot get used I shall run, run, run, I shall work, work, work, all the time rushing. There was no time to sit quiet, to talk, to understand. To tell you the truth, I was five years with Ford's and not one good friend did I have. Here, I hope, it will be more conducive to such activities as I always enjoy. A small town and so forth. I am German, you understand . . . but that's obvious. Well, sometime we get together and I will explain about myself. Meanwhile I hope you will not object too strongly of my arrival?

DAVID (Entranced): Hell no. I got no right to object.

GUS: Rights is not the question. I want to be welcome. Otherwise I will go away.

DAVID (Softly; extending his hand): No . . . you're welcome here . . . you are.

Gus (takes his hand, and laughs softly, thankfully. Their hands part. *Gus* turns a slow full circle, looking at the shop. *David* watches him like a vision. At last the German faces him again.)

(Quietly.) How old are you?

DAVID: Goin' on twenty.

GUS (Indicating the car, the shop . . . everything): How . . . how did you know what to do? You studied somewhere mechanics?

DAVID (With pride and yet uneasiness. The German has grown very tall in his eyes): Oh no—I just picked it up kinda.

(Wanders near the Marmon as though to hide it.) But I guess I got plenty to learn.

GUS: No, no! The best mechanics is made in this fashion. You must not feel at all . . . how shall I say . . . at a loss.

(Pause. They hold each other's gaze in moment of understanding. Slowly the German's eyes turn toward the Marmon. *David,* as though relinquishing it, moves aside now, not screening it any longer.) A brand-new car. What's his trouble?

DAVID (Still entranced, and yet he must laugh): You got me there. I've been at it all night. . . .

GUS (Going easily to car): Oh? What he complains of?

DAVID (For a moment he holds back; then the last shred of resentment fades

and he bursts out): She runs with a peculiar kind of a shudder . . . like a rubbing somewhere inside.
GUS: She misfires?
DAVID: That's what's so funny. She fires on eight and the carburetor's set right on the button.

(Pause. *Gus* looks down at the engine. *David* is bent over watching his face.)

GUS: If you . . . feel like it, you can start the engine.
DAVID (Looks at him in silence): You . . . you know what it is?
GUS (Reaches to him quickly): Look, boy, tell me and I will leave the town, I'll never come back.
DAVID: No, no . . . I want it to be . . . just the way it ought to be, the way it . . . happened.

(He goes to car door, gets in, starts the motor. The German stands listening for five seconds, then snaps his hand for the motor to be switched off. It is quiet again. *David* comes slowly out of the car and stands beside the German watching him.)

GUS: It is very rare. In a car so new. It comes sometimes with the Marmon, however.
DAVID (Softly): What is it?
GUS: (Turns straight to him): The crankshaft is sprung.
DAVID (For a long moment he stares into the German's face): You could tell by . . . just listening?
GUS: You can tell anything by listening. You going to work now?
DAVID (Looks at the car): Ya.

(He hurries around the front of the car, picks up a wrench, comes around and sets the wrench on a head nut and starts forcing it.)

GUS (Hesitates for a moment, then lays his hand on *David*): Don't take the head off.
DAVID (He stops moving. The wrench clatters out of his hand): I . . . I'm all mixed up. All I know is what I could figure out. I never went to mechanic's school. If it didn't work I kept trying one thing after another till it ran right. . . . I just fell into this thing by accident. I mean, there's no mechanic in this whole section, and I just helped people out in the beginning . . . I didn't even charge . . . and then they kept bringin' cars, y'know? And first thing I knew I had a business, and . . . I don't know anything about the science of it . . . I really don't know anything.
GUS: Nonsense. . . .
DAVID: No, I always knew a time would come when . . . this would happen. I mean somebody like you would come, and then I'd just . . . pack up. I knew it all the time. . . .
GUS: That's nonsense. You fixed plenty cars no doubt; you're a mechanic. . . .
DAVID: No, I'm not really. I don't know anything about metals, and ratios and. . . .
GUS (Grips his shoulder and points under the car): First you take the pan down.
DAVID (Slight pause): Ya?
GUS: Then you drop the bearings. Label them so you know where to put them back.
DAVID: Ya?
GUS: Then you drop the main bearings for the crankshaft.

DAVID: Ya?

GUS: Then you drop the shaft itself. Take it up to Burley, is a good shop there. Tell them to exchange for a new shaft.

DAVID: Can't I straighten this one?

GUS: Is no such thing possible for you.

DAVID: Could you straighten it?

GUS: I sold my instruments for this. You go to work now. Go ahead.

DAVID (Starts to move): You in a hurry to go away?

GUS: I'll stay, I'll watch you.

DAVID (Thankfully): O. K.

(He gets down on his knees and is about to get under the car.) You feel like workin'? Just for a couple of minutes?

GUS: You would like me to?

DAVID: I always wanted to see how somebody else works. Y'know?

GUS: All right, come on. We rip her open.

(He pulls off his coat. Slides under car.) You got a socket, a quarter inch?

DAVID (A new excitement in him): I ain't got sockets yet, but . . .

GUS (Under the car): That's all right, give me an open end.

(*David* hands him wrench quickly.) How much oil you got in here?

DAVID (On his knees): Just a couple of quarts. Maybe three. I just ran her a minute.

GUS (Untightening nuts underneath): All right, I'll loosen up and then we drain her. That your girl I saw walking out before?

DAVID: Be my wife pretty soon.

GUS: She has a beautiful walk . . . if you don't mind my saying.

DAVID (Settling on his stomach): No, that's all right. You married?

GUS: No, but I am always hopeful. There is a nice red-headed girl in this town?

DAVID (Laughs): She got to be red-headed?

GUS: Yes, I would prefer such a color. It always seemed to me in a small town would be many red-headed girls. Probably this is because in general I like a small town. When this car has to be ready?

DAVID: In the morning, if possible. You think it can?

GUS: You got a car to take this shaft to Burley?

DAVID: Yeh, that Ford outside. Oh—I got a crick in the back.

GUS: Spread out, take it easy.

DAVID (Relaxes on the floor): Gosh, you sure swing that wrench. Lots of times I do something and I wonder how they'd do it in the factory—you know, officially.

GUS: In the factory also they wonder sometimes how it's done officially.

DAVID (Laughs): Yeh, I bet.

(Pause. *Gus* works.) Gosh, I suddenly feel awful tired. I been at it all night.

GUS: Sleep, go ahead. I'll wake you when it gets interesting.

DAVID: . . . That's all right. I'll . . . I'll watch.

GUS (Softly): Go. Sleep.

DAVID (His head comes down on his arm, his face toward the German): No . . . I'll watch.

(For several moments *Gus* works in silence. *David's* breathing comes in longer draughts.)

GUS (Noticing his eyes closed): Mr. Frieber?

(*David* sleeps)

Gus comes out from under the car, takes his coat and lays it over *David*. He gets a pan which is lying near, places it under the car, opens a nut underneath and oil flows into the pan. *Gus* comes around and looks down at *David*. A smile comes to his face. He shakes his head wonderingly, and looks from *David* all around the shop. Then happily, and with a certain pride, he speaks softly. . . .)

GUS (To himself, with a slight shake of his head): A great country!

(He bends under the car watching the oil as the lights go down.)

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

(Lights come up on the same scene. From the doors offstage right a wide shaft of sunlight is pouring in. *David* is asleep where he was before, the coat still on him. But now the car is off the jack, and the hood is in place over the engine. The tools are in a neat pile nearby.)

(From offstage right voices are heard. The shadows of *Hester, J.B.* and *Dan Dibble* appear, then the persons. They are all dressed in lighter clothing than in the last scene, excepting for Dibble, for the weather has suddenly turned to spring. Their voices fall silent before they appear—they see *David* lying on the floor. They come to him and look down at him.)

J.B.: He slept here! (To *Dibble*.) See? He worked all night on that jalopy of yours. I hope you don't forget to thank him.

DAN (Fearfully touching the fender): It looks just the same as when I brought it. You think it's fixed?

J.B. (Looks at *David*): Don't worry, it's fixed.

HESTER: Should I wake him?

J.B.: You better. I'd like to tell him right away.

HESTER (Bends over and shakes him lightly): Davey? Davey?

DAVID: Huh?

HESTER: Wake up. J.B.'s here. It's morning.

DAVID: Oh.

(Sits up and sees *J.B.* and *Dibble*.) Oh, ya, ya.

(He gets up quickly. Looks at the coat for an instant.)

HESTER (Fixing his shirt straight): Is it all done?

DAVID: What? I'm asleep yet, wait a minute.

(He rubs his head and walks a few steps.)

J.B. (To *Dibble*, with a strangely possessive pride): That's when you're young. Sleep anywhere. Nothin' bothers you.

DAVID: What time is it?

J.B. About half-past-eleven.

DAVID (Astonished and frightened): Half-past-eleven! Gosh I didn't mean to sleep that long . . . !

(Looks around suddenly anxious.)

HESTER (Laughs): You look so *funny!*

J.B.: Well, how'd you do, Dave, all finished?

DAVID: Finished? Well, uh. . . .

(He looks at the car.)

J.B.: If you're not, Dan can wait.

DAVID: Ya . . . just a second, I. . . .

(He looks around the shop.)

HESTER: What're you looking for, your tools? They're right on the floor here.

(*David* keeps looking all around for an instant.)

(Looks at tools.)

DAVID: Oh, O.K.

(He looks at the car as though it were explosive. He lifts the hood and looks at the engine.)

J.B.: How was it, tough job?
DAVID: Heh? Ya, pretty tough.
J.B.: Anything wrong?
DAVID: No, I. . . .

(He gets on his knees and looks under the engine.)

DAN: Can I start her up now?
DAVID (Gets to his feet, looks up and down again): O.K., try her. Wait a minute, let me start her.
DAN (Following him to car door): Now, don't dirty the floor. . . .
J.B.: Don't worry about the floor, Dan, come over here.
DAN (Coming to front of car where *J.B.* and *Hester* are): They always get in with their dirty clothes. . . .

(Car engine starts. It runs smoothly, quietly. *J.B.* turns proudly smiling to *Dan* who creeps closer to it and listens. *Hester* watches *J.B.,* teetering on the edge of expectation, then watches *Dan.* After a moment the engine is shut off. David comes out of the car, comes slowly into view, his eyes wide.)

J.B.: (Beaming), (to Dibble): Well, you damn fool?
DAN (Excitedly): Why, she does, she does sound fine.

(He snoops around the car.)

DAVID: Look, J.B., I. . . .
J.B. (Raises his fist and bangs on the fender): Goddamn, Dave, I always said it! You know what you did?
HESTER: Davey, J.B.'s going to. . . .
J.B. (To *Hester*): I'm paying for it, at least let me tell it. Dan, come over here first and tell Dave what they did to you in Burley. Listen to this one, Dave.
DAN (Feeling the edge of the fender): I think he bumped it here.
J.B.: Oh, the hell with that, come over here and tell him.

(*Dan* comes): What about that guy in Burley?
DAN: Well they's a garage in Burley does tractor work. But he's not reasonable. . . .
J.B.: Tell him what he does.
DAN: He . . . I know a man can prove it . . . he tells you something's wrong where there ain't. I brought this one to him and he says he'll have to take her plum apart, every screw and bolt of her. So I told him, I says—not in so many words a' course—but I told him, I says, Fred, I paid twenty-one hundred dollars and sixty-five cents for that car seven months ago, and if she's got to be took apart now you can have the damned thing—excuse me, Miss. Well he had his mind set and wanted to charge a hundred and thirty-one dollars for the job. So, I figgered it was just about time I stopped subsidizin' the Burley Garage Incorporated.
J.B. (Scandalized): What you think of that, Dave? Go ahead, Dan, tell him your idea.
DAN: My idea is, why can't . . . ?
DAVID: Did he tell you what was wrong with the car? The Burley man?

DAN: Well, yes he did, he always tells you something, but I can't remember quite . . . Now wait a minute . . . These things have a dingus they call a . . . a crankshaft?

J.B. (Laughs): Crankshaft! What the hell did he want with the crankshaft?

DAN: I don't know, he claimed she was bent or busted or dented or. . . .

J.B. (Joyously, to *David*): How do you like that? And they shot Lincoln! Imagine him having the unbridled nerve to tell a grown man that a brand new Marmon's got a bent crankshaft! By God, Dan, you fellas up there must sure be a bunch of half-witted apes to take that stuff!

DAN: Not any more, I can tell you.

DAVID: Look, J.B., lemme tell you. . . .

J.B. (Drawing *David* and *Dan* together): Go ahead, Dave. And listen to this, Dan. This is the first honest word you ever heard out of a mechanic.

(To *David*): Go ahead, tell this poor sucker what the matter was.

(*David* stands dumbly, looking into *J.B.'s* ecstatic face. He turns to *Hester.*)

HESTER (Unable to stand still; softly): Tell him, Davey!

DAVID (Turns back to *J.B.* He sighs): Just a lot of small things, that's all. Carburetor, plugs. . . .

(He walks a few steps away) Nothing really much.

DAN (Astonished): Is that all?

DAVID: Just took a lot of time . . . but that's about all.

J.B.: Well? What do you say, Danny?

DAN (Goes to *David*): Look, David. I have a proposition for you. When I started bringin' my tractors to the Burley people they didn't even have the tools hardly. Today, you know what that shop is. I can lead the gang down here just like I led them into the Burley shop. If you'll oblige me in this way. Whenever they's a job to do on my tractors charge me for parts and that's all. If you'll do that for me, I guarantee you more business the year round than you can handle.

(Looks at car.) That motor didn t run that smooth the day I took her out of the show window.

DAVID (Turns to him from the car): Well, I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Dibble, but I'm not tooled up for tractor work. . . .

J.B.: Now, wait a minute. . . .

DAVID: Let me say something. To work on heavy engines like that, and tractors in general a man has got to be a . . . Well, I'm not tooled up for it, that's all, I haven't got the machinery, the whole. . . .

J.B.: But you've got the machinery.

(*David* looks at him.) You get out and buy everything you want. Fix up this building. Lay out a concrete driveway in the front. I'll pay the bills. Give me one per cent on my money.

DAVID (As though a fever were rising in him): I don't know if I'm ready for that, J.B. . . . I'd have to study about tractors. . . .

J.B.: Then study! Now's the *time,* Dave. You're young, strong, you don't get tired, by the time you're thirty, you can have five kids and the world by the back of the neck! You never made a mistake, boy, don't make one now! . . . A tractor station! Dave Frieber, Incorporated! Let me be some good in my life!

HESTER: Davey, don't you feel good? I don't think he feels good.

(She goes to him and feels his head.)

DAVID (Taking her hand from his forehead): I'm all right.

(Pause.) There's a new mechanic moved into town.

J.B. (Struck): Well, what the hell.

DAVID: Yeh. He seems to know what he's about. He's a German, worked at Ford's, Hudson.

J.B.: Is that what's got you? 'Cause if it is, you're crazy. An outsider'll never get to first base around here. People know you, they like you, and with machinery you'll run him out of town in six months!

DAVID: He's good, J.B.

J.B.: How do you know he's good?

DAVID: . . . I can tell. I'd like to kinda stand by for a while. Just till I see how things work out. You can never tell.

J.B.: It's my money, Dave. Let me worry about it, will you? My store's big enough to support a dozen children and I haven't got one. Let me *do* something for you, will ya? You make me sad, Dave. You really do.

(*Dan* wanders around the car, wiping off spots with his handkerchief: *David* stares at him.)

HESTER (Softly pleading): Please Davey. Why not? What happened to you . . . ?

J.B. (Half-joking and loudly): And when the hell're you going to marry this girl! Build a house, spread out, get fat. . . . Davey Frieber, you got a life ahead of you like a beam of sunshine! Laugh, for God's sake—what's holdin' you down—look outside, it's spring again! Come on, laugh!

DAVID (A smile breaks out on his face): O.K. . . .

(Laughs in a cackle. Looks at *Hester's* smiling, proud face, laughs louder, grabs her around the waist as she kisses him and laughs.)

J.B.: That-a-boy! Laugh! Come on we'll get a bottle, the hell with everything! We'll get Shory and Pat and drink all day! What do you say, boy? A party!

DAVID (Loudly, as though to shout everything else away): Sure, let's have a party. In the middle of the day! To hell with workin'. How about it, Hess?

HESTER (Excited and very proud): You go. I'd better be home today. Go on, Davey, a bachelor party!

DAVID: I'm with you, J.B.!

(Turns strongly to *Dibble.*) Mr. Dibble, that'll be thirty-five dollars!

DIBBLE (Stops polishing. Comes to *David,* taking out bills): Well, I hope it's worth it, that's all; I . . . thirty-five?

DAVID (A free, almost wild-free, sense is flying through him): For my labor, Mr. Dibble, my time, my work . . . Cash on the line.

(Slaps his palm.) Thirty-five.

DIBBLE: Yes, fine, all right.

(Counts out money very slowly.) One, two, three, four. . . .

J.B. (Impatiently): What're those, all ones?

DIBBLE: I never carry anything but ones. Then I'm sure that I don't leave a five- or ten-dollar bill by mistake. The government really ought to print different sizes. Five-dollar bills make me jittery.

(Goes on counting into *David's* hand.)

J.B. (*David* laughs with him, and *Hester*): Dan Dibble, you are the most curious man I ever met in my life. Will you hurry up, we want to get outa here!
HESTER: Don't, he'll lose his count . . . !

(They are all laughing.)

(*Gus* appears.)

GUS (Behind them and right): May I come in?

(Silence. *David* turns his head quickly to see him. *Dibble,* bent over *David's* hand, continues laboriously to lay money into it.)

DAVID: Oh, hello.

(He tries to move. *Dibble* moves with him, counting.)

GUS: I left my coat.
DAVID: Ya, it's right over here.
(*Dibble* keeps counting. *Gus* comes downstage and crossing.) Get settled all right?
GUS: I'm sorry, don't let me disturb your transaction.

(He gets his coat off the fender.)

DAVID (While *Dibble* counts on): Gustav, I like you to meet . . . This is J.B. Feller. Owns that brick-front department store down the street.
GUS (Bows slightly): How do you do.

(*J.B.* nods.)

DAVID: And this is Hester, my wife . . . that is. . . . Well, yeh, my wife.
GUS: I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Frieber.
HESTER: It sounds nice, you sayin' it. How do you do.
DAVID (Looks down at *Dibble's* head bent over his hand): And this here. . . .
DIBBLE: . . . thirty-five. There you are.
DAVID (Pushes the money back to *Dibble,* suddenly flushing): Uh . . . you better count it again.
DIBBLE: But I just counted it.
DAVID (Without looking at anything; snappish): Well, it's wrong, it should be . . . fifteen.

(Glances at *Gus.*)

(*Dibble's* mouth falls open.)

(*David* starts moving right, on the line.) This is Gustav Eberson. . . .
(*Gus* occupies the center of the shop, *David* is at the side.) The new mechanic in town.

(*David* turns and walks right.)

DIBBLE: Wait, here's your money!
J.B.: Dave where are you going!
DAVID (Turns for an instant, talks over his shoulder): I'm tired. I think I'll go to sleep.
J.B.: But what about the party—and the money!

(*David* walks out.)

HESTER (Pointing to *Dibble*): The money, David! Why . . . he's running!

(She runs out after him, calling in alarm, "Davey!")

(*J.B.* turns slowly to Gus, who smiles pleasantly. A look of anger and deep perplexity covers the fat man's face. . . . *Dan Dibble* bent, and counting his money.)

J.B.: What's your coat doing here?
GUS: To tell you the truth. . . .

(He glances toward the car.)

J.B.: Yeh?
GUS: It dropped off the moving van as we passed here last night. I stopped off to pick it up and bunked into Mr. Frieber outside. He was cold. The rest follows.

(*J.B.* looks at him with some resentment.) I agree with you. They are a fine couple. But after all, I am already moved in, am I not?

(*J.B.* silent.) Good day.

(*J.B.* watches him walk off right with the coat on his arm, as . . .)

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

SCENE: June. Three years later. The living-room of the Falk, now David's house. A farm room, but brightly done over. Solid door to outside at left. In the back wall, left, a door to the dining-room. A stairway at the back, its landing at right. Two windows at right. Two windows flanking door to outside at left. Good blue rug, odd pieces, some new, some old. Oak. A pair of worn rubber boots beside the door, left.

ON THE RISE: The stage is empty. A perfect summer day, not too hot. Noon. After a moment the doorbell rings.

HESTER (From above; shouts excitedly): They're here! Davey!
DAVID (Hurrying down the stairs, putting a white shirt on. He wears pressed pants, shined shoes, his hair has just been combed; shouting up): I'll get it, I'm going!
HESTER (Her head sticking out at the junction of banister and ceiling. She quickly surveys the room as *David* comes off the stair): Get your boots out of there! I just fixed up the house!

(Bell rings.)

DAVID (Calling to door): Just a minute!

(Getting boots together. To *Hester*.) Go on, get dressed, it's almost noon!

(He opens door to dining-room.)

HESTER: Don't put them in there! They're filthy! Down the cellar!
DAVID: But I always put them in here!
HESTER: But you promised once the house is painted!

(Door opens. Enter *Gus*.)

GUS: Don't bother. It's only me.

(He wears a white Palm Beach suit, no hat. *Hester* and *David* stare at him in amazement. She comes down the stairs. She is dressed in a bathrobe, but has her best shoes on. Her hair is set.)

HESTER: Why, Gus! You look so handsome!
GUS: It is such a special day, I decided to make an impression on myself. I don't look too much like a gangster?
HESTER: No, you go perfectly with the room.

DAVID (Laughing with *Gus*): Watch yourself or she'll hang you in a frame over the couch.

(Rushing at *Hester.*) Get up and dress yourself, you screwball!

HESTER (Squealing, she runs to the stairs and up a few steps, and leans over the banister): Is your girl outside? Bring her in.

DAVID: That's right, where's your girl?

GUS (Looking up): Well, we both decided suddenly that until she can become as beautiful as Hester. . . .

HESTER: Oh, you.

GUS (Opening his arms like a pleading lover): Until she shows ability to make over a house like this was, and until et cetera and et cetera, she is not the girl for me. So I haven't seen her all week. Anyway, she didn't have red hair like I imagined.

DAVID (To *Hester*): Get dressed, will you? They'll be here in a minute! You know the way Pat likes to wait!

HESTER (To *Gus*): Stand in the middle of the room when they come in. You make it look just like the pictures in the *Ladies' Home Journal.*

DAVID (Starting after her): Get dressed, will ya! Pat'll cut my head off if we're not ready!

(*Hester* laughs with delight and runs upstairs.)

GUS (Looking around): It came out so nice. You know, this house shines in the sun a quarter of a mile away.

DAVID: Well, look at that sun!

(Goes right to windows.) God must've pulled up the sun this morning, grabbed him by the back of the neck, pointed at the earth, and said—make it a baseball day.

GUS (Touching the wall): I can't get over this house. Now it is truly a place to call home.

DAVID (Laughs musingly, indicating windows at right): What a feeling! When I came down this morning that window caught my eye. You don't remember, it was when we were kids; I used to sneak under that window and peek in here to watch Hester doing her homework. And then I used to sneak away. And now I can walk in and outa this house fifty times a day and sleep up in his room night after night!

GUS: And with his daughter.

DAVID (Laughs): Yeh, with his daughter.

(Looks through window.) Wherever he is I bet he still can't figure it out. I'll put on a tie. The bunch'll be here in a minute.

GUS: Go ahead. I'll read your encyclopedia. Where's the old lady today?

(*Gus* goes toward bookcase near couch.)

DAVID (Going toward landing): She's over J.B.'s house looking after Lennie.

(Laughs.) That fat man, he's got to have all the old women in town nursing his wife.

(Halts at landing, turns.) Say, Gus, come over here a minute. I been wanting to ask you something.

(They meet in the center of the room. *David* glances upstairs. Stands a moment trying to speak.) . . . Did you ever hear of it happening where people didn't have any kids because of the man?

GUS: Sure, why not? Why?

DAVID (Pause. He glances upstairs): I don't know what to do, see. I found out she's been—just happened to hear about it—she's been going to the doctor. That is, she stopped going about a week ago. And she never told me about it at all, you see? I kinda believe she wants me to go now. You know, it's been three years now and nothing's happened. And everything's so ready, you know? Been ready for a long time now . . . and there's no sign at all.

GUS: Why don't you go and talk it over with her?

DAVID: Yeh, she wants me to, I know, but I . . . I can't get myself to, isn't that awful? I just close up inside. We always kinda took it for granted that somehow when the time was right a kid would just naturally come along. But time's been right almost two years now, and it's pretty hard to bring it up, y'know? No matter what we're doing, we always seem to be waiting to talk about it, and I can't.

(Pause.) It's not possible that we'll never have any, I can't believe that, Gus.

GUS: Well, see a doctor. I don't believe in avoiding decisions.

DAVID (With a tinge of guilt): No, that's just what I want.

GUS: Then why don't you see the doctor? Go tomorrow.

DAVID (Slight pause): Yeh . . . but I don't know if I could ever tell Hester that because of me. . . . You have no idea how she is about kids. You just can't imagine.

GUS: You would rather keep on hoping when there may be no hope?

DAVID: How can I stop hoping? The tractors, the shop—everything we've got is just cryin' out for a kid. There doesn't seem to be a good enough reason for us not to have any. It doesn't seem . . . *right*.

GUS: Right! What do you live by, the awards of some cloudy court of justice? Go to a doctor, biology always decides. There is no justice in the world.

DAVID (Goes to landing, is about to start upstairs): I'll never believe that, Gus. If people don't receive according to what they deserve inside then we're living in a madhouse.

GUS: Madhouse, yes . . . that's a wonderful word for it!

HESTER (From above): There's a car stopping in front of the house!

(Coming down.) Did you put your boots away?

DAVID (Slightly annoyed): Yeh, I put 'em away!

(Goes across to door.)

HESTER (Hurrying downstairs): You didn't!

(Hurrying across the room toward boots.) He'll have the place like a pigsty in a week!

(*David* opens the door and looks out.)

GUS (To *Hester*): Get used to it, the place will never be so neat once you have children around.

(*David* turns to him quickly, resentment in his face.)

HESTER (Stops moving. An eager glow lights up her expression. The boots are in her hand): Don't you think it is a wonderful house for children?

DAVID (To someone outside): Hullo! Didn't expect to see you around here! Here's a friend of yours, Hess.

(Low, to *Gus,* with a broad wink): Just listen to this fella.

(Enter *Harry Bucks.* He wipes his feet heavily on the door mat . . . He is a small chipper man of forty-five. He wears a good, wrinkled sports suit.)

HESTER: Oh, you're the man with mink!

BUCKS (Coming in): Mink is right, and nothing but the right mink. Am I intruding? Hope not.

HESTER: No, come in. . . . I forgot your name.

DAVID (To *Hester*): Bucks. Harry Bucks. Mr. Bucks, I like you to meet Gus Eberson. He's with me over at the shop.

BUCKS (Leans far over and shakes *Gus's* hand): Good to know you, Gus. Look more like a banker than a mechanic.

DAVID: Best mechanic there is.

BUCKS (To all): What I always say, never judge a man by his clothes. A man and his clothes are soon parted.

(Laughs.)

HESTER: Will you sit down? I'll put these things away.

(Takes boots through door at back, left.)

DAVID (As *Gus* and *Bucks* sit): I don't know why I'm always so glad to see you, Bucks. I mean, you being a salesman.

(He laughs.) How's the mink business these days?

(To *Gus*) Mr. Bucks has that big mink ranch over near Cassville.

GUS: Yes, I remember him very well.

BUCKS: Me? I don't recall meetin' you. . . . Well, say, I do too. You're the man who fixed my old Chevvy truck over on Poplar Street last . . . no, it was two years ago, wasn't it?

GUS: How is it, still running?

BUCKS: Good as new. Workin' with Frieber now, eh?

(To *David.*) What'd you do, amalgamate?

DAVID: Well, in a way, yeh.

GUS: And in a way we didn't. I ran out of money and customers after the first seven months. Spiritually, you might say, we amalgamated. Economically, however, I am working for Mr. Frieber since over two years.

BUCKS (Feeling a tension, laughs): Well, say, this is the first time I knew a hired man to insist he wasn't the boss's partner and the boss to let on he was.

GUS: Mr. Frieber is not comfortable unless everybody he knows is as happy as himself. He suffers sometimes from an overdeveloped sense of responsibility.

BUCKS: And that's just why I spotted him as a natural mink man.

(To both.) You know I don't go around callin' on just anybody. I size a man up first. Frieber is a natural man for mink.

(To *David.*) You're a careful man, Mr. Frieber, a very careful man.

DAVID (Smiling): How do you know?

BUCKS: Well, your reputation for one thing. But the first time I walked onto this place, I knew. Everything's laid out for production. And above all this farm's clean, clean as a hospital. That's why I keep comin' back. Mink needs a clean place. You got time for a few facts today?

DAVID: I could listen to you talk about

mink any day, but tell you the truth we're expecting some people now. Goin' up to Burley for the ball game. You heard about Amos Beeves, didn't you?
BUCKS: Pitchin' against that colored team? Say, if he can knock them boys over he really belongs in the big leagues.

(To both.) I was only just sayin' to my sister, why that boy never got took up by the big leagues is beyond me. He just *seems* like a professional, y'know?
DAVID (With inner joy): I guess after today's game you can tell your sister Amos Beeves is playin' with the Detroit Tigers.
BUCKS: Well say! They really took him, eh?
DAVID: Just about. A Tiger scout's going to be in the grandstand today.
BUCKS: Well say! It's about time.
DAVID: Yep, things even up, I guess, in the long run. We're all excited around here. Practically everybody in town's goin' up to Burley. Havin' a big party here after the game . . . combination house warming, too.

(Enter *Hester* from dining room.)

HESTER (To *Bucks*): He just never stops talking about mink.

(Sits down.) Have you still got that tiny little one with the white spot on her head?
DAVID (Seeing *Hester's* interest kindles a strange liveliness in him): Oh, that one's probably been in and out of a dozen New York night clubs by this time!

(They laugh—excepting *Hester*.)

HESTER (Disturbed. To *Bucks*): Oh, you didn't kill *her*.
DAVID (To *Gus*): That's the way you get about mink.

(With wonder.) They're like people. . . . little nervous people. Did you know that if one of a litter disappears the mother's liable to just pine away and die of a broken heart? Ever hear of a thing like that?
GUS: I never even heard of people dying of a broken heart! Apparently the mink represents the next higher stage of human development.
BUCKS (Getting to business): No; thing to remember is a mink is a little human being with fur on. I call them my little bankers. Pour a dollar's worth of feed down their gullets and they'll return you forty per cent interest; best little bankers in the world.
DAVID: Yeh, except when they fail, Harry, except when they fail.
BUCKS: Mink never fail.
DAVID (Laughs, looks at *Bucks* sideways): Oh now, Harry. . . .
BUCKS: Well they don't. It's their keepers fall down on 'em.
DAVID: I don't know about that. I been askin' around lately. People tell me you're the only one they ever heard of was able to keep mink alive. Plenty of them's tried and they just can't make a go of it.
BUCKS: I'm glad you made the inquiries. It shows you're a careful man. And now I'll tell you my answer. Easiest thing in the world is to kill a mink. Mink'll die of a cold, a draught, they'll die of heart failure; indigestion can kill them, a cut lip, sex trouble, or a bad tooth. And worse than that, the mink is a psychological old woman. I wear an old brown canvas coat when I work around them. If I change that coat or

bring a stranger in amongst the cages it might throw them off their feed for two days. A big loud noise like thunder, or a heavy hail storm comes and the mother's liable to pick up the litter, put 'em out in the open part of the cage, and then she'll go back into the nest box and close her eyes. She thinks only she's in danger if they're out of her sight. When the storm's over you might have six or eight kits drowned to death out there. I've seen mink murder each other, I've seen them eat themselves to death and starve themselves to death; and I've seen them die of just plain worry. But! Not on my ranch. I'll show my records to anybody.

DAVID (An inner excitement moves him about): Isn't that a wonderful thing, Gus? They're like people!

GUS (To *David*): It suddenly becomes obvious to me why mink is a very costly fur. But I don't understand why anybody would want to raise them. Especially you, Dave.

DAVID: Can't you see the thrill in it? When you send a load of skins to New York you know you *did* something. It's not like owning a store or a . . . I mean like making your money out of something you happen to own. It's because of *you*, or what *you are* that they don't die; you can't bluff a mink into staying alive. Yeh, a thing like mink . . . that sizes a man up, tells him what he's made out of.

BUCKS (To *Gus* and *Hester*): He hit it right on the head. But here's another thing; I'm a bachelor myself. Always will be. But when the whelping season's over I honestly feel that I ain't without children in the world.

DAVID (Instantly): That's a fact. They are . . . they're just like children.

(Wide-eyed, as though rediscovering a hidden feeling.) By God, that is true. . . .

HESTER (A slight revulsion showing on her face): How can you say that . . . ?

DAVID: It's true, Hess, they're. . . .

HESTER (Gets up quickly): But they're *not*, Davey!

DAVID: What's wrong? I only meant that. . . .

HESTER (Won't look at him): They're not like children at all. They're killed every year. I couldn't stand having them around if I felt they were like children. I don't want you ever to say that again!

DAVID (With alarm): Well, God Almighty, I don't know what you're getting excited about!

HESTER (Her full anger): You know well enough what I'm excited about!

(She bursts into sobs and runs upstairs.)

DAVID (Goes as far as the landing and calls up): Hester, please . . . !

(He stands listening to her sobs. Then goes slowly to the window and looks out.)

GUS: My advice is for you to finish that conversation upstairs, David.

BUCKS: Hope I didn't say anything to upset her.

DAVID: No, no . . . she's . . . just sensitive that way.

(Turns to *Bucks*.)

GUS: Go, David, go up.

DAVID (To *Bucks*): Suppose you send me about . . . let's say ten good medium-dark Yukon breeders to start off with.

BUCKS: Ten medium-dark Yukon, right.

(Rises.) You won't regret it, Mr. Frieber.

GUS (Gets up. To *David*): In my opinion you are making a mistake. A terrible, terrible mistake.

DAVID: I think I know what I'm doing, Gus.

GUS: Oh, without a doubt.

(Counts on fingers.) But you already own a repair shop, a big tractor station, a heavy interest in the lime quarry, a hundred and ten acres. . . .

DAVID: They're not like mink, Gus. None of those things are.

GUS (His voice growing earnest and louder): Naturally! But if you came once in a while and worked in your shop, and fired some of the help around here and labored again in your own fields, maybe they would be "like mink"! These things are yours. You generated them just like Mr. Bucks generates his mink.

DAVID: That's just it, Gus. None of those things . . . are really mine.

GUS (Slight pause. Quieter): I see. You stole what you have? You are a thief?

DAVID: . . . Does a thing really belong to you because your name is on it? Don't you have to feel you're smart enough, or strong enough, or good enough, or something enough to have won it before it's really yours?

GUS: Where did you get what you have, then? Everything dropped from a cloud into your hands? Are you mad?

DAVID (Turns away from *Gus*): I tell you, Bucks, let me call you. I'll let you know.

BUCKS: Oh, I'll bide my time. I know a mink man when I see one. Just remember, mink is brown currency, legal tender. Why, in New York they murder people for a mink coat. Women sell their jewels for mink, they sell their . . . them New York women'll sell damn near anything for mink!

(Horns of two cars sound urgently outside. *David* starts toward the door, then jumps back to stair landing . . . *Gus* goes to door and opens it.)

DAVID (Calling upstairs): Come on down, Hess. They're all here!

(Runs across left to door.)

GUS (Looking out): Look, like two peacocks!

DAVID (Exuberantly): Here he comes! Christy Mathewson the second!

(Enter *Amos* and *Patterson* followed by *J.B.*)

(Grabbing *Amos's* hand.) How's it feel, Ame!

AMOS (Winds up and pitches): Wham!—He's out!

PAT (Throwing up his arms): God bless this day!

(Suddenly.) Where's Hester! I'm not waiting for anybody!

(Threatens to go out again.)

J.B.: Shory's waiting in the car! Let's go!

HESTER (From above): Coming down!

DAVID: What're you lookin' so sad about, Patsy!

(Bends forward, musses *Pat.*)

PAT (Indignantly): You want to suffocate in here? Open the windows in this house!

(He rushes around throwing windows up.)

DAVID (Laughing): What're you doin'? We're going in a minute!
PAT: Let the day come in! What a day! What a year! What a nation!

(*Hester* comes hurrying downstairs, *David's* jacket and tie on her arm.)

HESTER: Where's the telegram! Pat . . . !
J.B. (Seeing *Hester,* leaps to stair landing): There's my baby!
(Hugs her as she screams.) What do you think of it, Hess, eh?
HESTER (Breaking from *J.B.*): Did you bring the telegram, Pat?
PAT: I don't need to bring it. I will never forget that telegram so long as I live.
(Takes it out of his pocket.) "Western Union. Class of Service. This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol. . . ."
HESTER: What're you reading that part for?
(Tries to grab it from him.) What did the scout say?
PAT: I'm reading it to you just the way I read it when I got it—from the very top, to the very bottom.
DAVID: He's crazy! Hey, Patsy, you're crazy!

(He musses *Pat's* hair, all laughing.)

PAT: Lemme go, lemme read this.
(They are quiet.) I haven't felt this way since the last time I read the Bible. Honestly. "Patterson Beeves, 26 Murdock Street. Will be in Burley for the Black Giants game Sunday, July 16th. Looking forward to seeing Amos Beeves' performance. Best regards, Augie Belfast, Detroit Tigers."
(Looks around imperiously.) Twenty-two years I have been waiting for this telegram. Training him down the cellar since he was old enough to walk. People laughed when Amos got bad marks in school. Forget the homework, I said. Keep your eye on the ball. Concentration, I said, a man can only be one thing, let them laugh! Who was right!
J.B. (Touched, and fearing *Pat's* continuing indefinitely): For God's sake, let's all have a drink!
DAVID: Comin' up!

(Runs across left and out the door at back.)

HESTER (Pointing outside): I'll bring Delia in!

(She starts across to door.)

PAT: No, we've got to pick her up at J.B.'s house. You know my wife, if there's a pregnant woman within thirty miles she's got to be there night and day.

(Automatically massages *Amos's* arm. *Amos* stands quiet as *Bucks* watches *Amos* awesomely.)

HESTER (To *J.B.*): I didn't call Lennie today, how is she?
GUS: I'll bring Shory in. He likes a drink.

(*Gus* goes out left.)

J.B. (Holds his hand out to *Hester*): What do you think of this?

HESTER: Why, it's a wedding ring. You giving Lennie a new ring?
J.B. (Warmly): No, this is for me. Silly, I guess, isn't it? But ever since Lennie told me she was havin' a baby I been feeling like all those other years didn't really happen to us. It's mad, but I like to think we're newlyweds. I *feel* that way anyhow. So I just took this outa the store. Pretty, isn't it?
HESTER (Flings her arms around him): You're such a silly man!

(Enter *Shory*, pushed in by *Gus*.)

SHORY: Hey, cut that out, Poppa!

(Enter *David* with drinks on tray.)

(To *Hester*.) Fat stuff thinks that just because he's going to have an heir he's gotta show all the girls how he did it.
HESTER (Three-quarters joking, but only that much. To *Shory*): And you've got a filthy mind.
SHORY: Madam, don't flatter me.
(To *David*, who has been watching *Hester* since *Shory* came in.) Hey, husband, where's that drink?
PAT (To all): One minute! Amos!
(Points for *Amos* to move to right wall.) Man on first!
AMOS: Oh, Dad, I know the plays.
PAT: Just do what I say. I don't want any slip-ups on the bases today. Everybody yell when I tell ya!
AMOS: Oh. . . .

(Fumes a little, takes his place at right, assumes pitcher's stance.)

PAT: All right now. Man on first.
AMOS: Ya?
PAT: Man on third.
AMOS: Ya?
PAT: Two out. Pitch!
(*Amos* raises his arms slowly, warily.) Everybody make noise!

(Everybody shouts, calls encouragement, yells.)

(To *Amos*, and pointing behind him.) Man stealing second!
(*Amos* pivots around, throws to "third.") Man on third comin' home!
(Squats like catcher while *Amos* with a pointing finger toward audience follows the path of the man coming home and the ball being thrown by the third baseman to the catcher. *Pat* "catches" the ball, tags the runner on home plate, jerks up his thumb and yells . . .) He's out!

(Everybody bursts out laughing and cheering, patting *Pat's* back.)

DAVID: Get your drinks! Come on, everybody. Before we go!

(Gives out the drinks. . . .)

PAT: Good work, Ame.
(To all.) Y'see, base play requires the utmost concentration. Down the cellar, of course, it's nice and quiet, but in the ball park. . . .
DAVID (Raises his glass): Come on, a toast! To everybody's luck—everybody's!
GUS: Up with the glasses!
(All raise their glasses.) To Amos and Pat! And the world's series in two years!

(Starts to drink.)

DAVID: Wait! Make one big toast . . . to all our heart's desires. For Amos! For Pat!
GUS: For J.B. Feller! May his heir be born easily.

DAVID: To Shory!

GUS (Holds his glass toward *Shory*): To Shory. . . .

(Stops.) What does Shory want?

SHORY: Me? I want to go fishin' tomorrow.

DAVID: No, something real, Shory! Come on, everything's going to come true!

SHORY: It is? Well then, I want to go fishin' . . . and catch something.

DAVID: All right, wise guy. How about you, Gus? To Gus!

GUS: May he find a girl reasonably soon, without a temper, but with red hair. Now, to David and Hester. To their prosperity, their shop, their tractor station, their farm. . . .

BUCKS (Suddenly struck with the idea): And their mink!

HESTER (Quick complaint): No. . . .

DAVID (He looks at *Hester*. Her face softens toward him): Not the mink now! From today on everything is coming true! To our children.

GUS: To their children.

J.B.: Their children.

HESTER (Softly): And in this year. Say that.

DAVID (Their eyes meet for an instant, and hold): In this year . . . everything our hearts desire . . . *all of us;* in this year.

(All drink.)

PAT (Looks at watch): Hey! We're late! We're getting drunk and the whole world is waiting for us out there! Come on!

(They all rush out yelling and laughing as . . .)

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 2

SCENE: About seven o'clock that night. An office-bedroom at the back of David's house. A desk is upstage left. A window in the left wall. Downstage a bed. Downstage right a bureau. In right wall upstage of bureau is a door leading to a short corridor which runs upstage out of sight to the kitchen and the rest of the house. This room does not occupy the entire width of the stage. A suitcase lies on the floor near the bed.

ON THE RISE: *Amos* is seen asleep on the bed, his clothes on. Through the window branches of a tree can be seen and a piece of darkening sky. It is dusk. From the front of the house is dimly heard the noise of a party, but no voices can be distinguished, only an occasional rise of hilarity which subsides.

Presently *Patterson* enters and closes the door behind him. He walks to the bed and stands over *Amos*. After a moment he bends over and lightly kisses *Amos's* face. *David* enters. *Patterson* puts finger to lip. *David* shuts the door quietly and comes to the bed and looks at Amos.

PAT: Did you ever see such a powerful face?

DAVID: He's good, Pat. After that game today nobody can doubt it. He's good.

PAT (Warmly): You're a friend, Dave. Nobody but you knew how I suffered all these years. What a newspaper story this'll make! Me planning it this way for such a long time, and him prac-

ticin' down the basement. Just shows you how things work themselves out.
DAVID: I felt like singin' after that game. I mean you look at all the people you know, eating their hearts out for some little thing they got every right to have, and for no good reason just can't seem to lay hands on it. . . . It almost had me scared, y'know?
PAT: Scared?
DAVID: I mean you begin to wonder when something's going to come along for you.
PAT: Like what do you mean?
DAVID: A big unhappiness of some kind; a loss, a . . . you know what I mean.

(Looks down at *Amos.*) Today is like coming out of a place where I was all alone. We're all the same now; you, and J.B. and me, anyway. I like it . . . bein' the same.

(Slight pause. *Pat* stands fascinated.)

PAT: I better get him washed.

(Bends over.) Ame? Come on, boy, time to get up.
AMOS: Whu. . . .

(Moans and grunts.)

PAT (Lovingly mimicking him): Whu, glub, blig . . . what's the matter, boy? Come on, up and at 'em!

(He lifts *Amos* by the shoulders.)

AMOS (Sitting up): Did he come?
PAT: Expecting him any minute now. Come on, you got to get washed up. Appearances still count, you know.
AMOS: Did he call up?
PAT: You heard what he told me in the locker room. He's got some wires to send and long distance phoning to do. And then he'll see us here. Hell, he's probably reporting back to Detroit for the O.K. to sign you up.
AMOS: I'm scared, Dad.
PAT: Scared! You're in, Ame. You pitched the greatest game of your life today! You're in solid!
AMOS: I bet he won't come back here. I bet he's on his way back to Detroit. . . .
DAVID: Amos, the man promised he'd come. He just happened to have some business to tend to in Burley. He'll be here.
AMOS (Gets up): Where's Mom? I want Mom in here.
PAT: Now you come and get washed. Your mother went back to J.B.'s house. She and the old lady Falk are stayin' with Lennie.
AMOS: That's my party out there, ain't it? I want Mom here! What's she stayin' with Lennie all the time for?

(Enter *Hester.*)

HESTER: Where's J.B. gone off to?
DAVID: Ain't he out front with the crowd?
HESTER: Delia just phoned from his house. She called the doctor for Lennie.
DAVID: Lennie! What's happened to Lennie!
HESTER (Calming him): Nothing serious. Delia just wants to be sure. Didn't you see J.B.?
DAVID (Nervously): I'll go look for him, he's around somewhere.

(At the door, turns to *Amos.*) You get washed up, Amos, your scout'll be here any minute. You want to look nice.

(Exit *David.*)

HESTER (To *Pat*): I'll get you some towels.

PAT: Oh no, we carry our own. You never can tell about strange towels, y'know.

(He opens suitcase. *Amos* looks out window.)

HESTER (Ready to laugh): Well, I wasn't going to give you a dirty towel, you stupid.

PAT (Standing with towel): For twenty-two years I've kept him practically sterilized. I'm not going to lay him low with an infection now. Come on, Ame, we'll get you cleaned up.

HESTER (Enjoying herself): Oh, Pat, you're just like an old hen! A person would think he was George Washington or something.

(She goes to door.)

PAT (*Amos* beside him ready to go): That isn't a very kindly thing to say, Hester.

HESTER: Well, supposing he didn't make the big leagues? It isn't a question of life or death. A person goes on living.

PAT: I wouldn't call it living, Hester. Not when I spent twenty-two years. . . .

HESTER: Well, I don't understand it. If a person can't be one thing, he can just go after something else, that's all.

PAT: I guess you never wanted anything very bad, Hester.

HESTER: I've got everything I want, and if I didn't have it, I'd just go right on enjoying what I did have. I just can't understand why people. . . .

(Enter *J.B.* followed by *David* and *Gus. J.B.* is slightly drunk.)

DAVID: Here he is, Hester.

J.B. (Goes directly to *Hester;* takes her hand): What happened? Where is she?

HESTER: She's home. I thought you'd want to go back and stay with her. But I guess you better not, J.B. . . .

J.B.: Oh no, I can't go home like this.

(*Pat* leads *Amos* out.)

DAVID: Sit down, J.B., she'll be all right. The doctor's goin' over there.

J.B. The doctor!

(Grabs *David's* lapel.) Why does she need a doctor!

DAVID (Out of his own fear): How the hell do I know! Will you sit down and stop acting like a fool?

(He makes *J.B.* sit down on a chair.) Now stay there, and pull yourself together. Hester, you better go out front. Somebody ought to be there when the scout comes.

J.B. (Rocking slightly from the waist): Why does it always happen when I get drunk? Something awful, something bad. God Almighty, why can't I stop!

HESTER: You're acting like a stupid. A woman's got to have a little trouble when she's carrying a baby. Especially a woman Lennie's age.

J.B. (Looking at nothing): That's just it, that's just it. It's so late, it's so late . . .

HESTER: You don't even know if it's serious, why do you . . . ?

DAVID: Go out, Hester. Call his house. See what the doctor says.

HESTER (Going to door): Oh, he makes me sick.

DAVID: Leave him alone, it's nobody's fault.

HESTER: It's *his* fault. If drinking

makes him unhappy why does he drink?

DAVID (Irritated): Things aren't just that simple, you know!

HESTER: Oh, push!

(She goes out.)

GUS (Sitting): I think, J.B., if you walk around you'll clear your head.

J.B.: I'm not drunk, I just can't go near her like this. She hates me this way, she hates me! If she loses that child I'll kill myself, I swear to God!

(He stands suddenly. They force him down.)

DAVID: Take it easy, J.B., for Pete's sake, nothing's going to happen.

J.B. (Rocking from the waist): I feel it, Davey, I just feel it. It's exactly like the last time, I know it.

DAVID: I didn't know she'd had one.

J.B.: My first, my first wife, my dear first wife. Oh, God in Heaven. . . .

DAVID (Sitting again on the bed): When were you married before?

J.B. (Rocking, rocking): My dear first wife, my Celia. She was nineteen, I was twenty-one. Oh, Chicago's a dreary place with no kid, no wife, no nothin'. Nine years, I drank nine solid years after that, Davey. You don't know what it is, you can't forget when it hits you like that for no reason. No good reason in the world . . . she was only nineteen!

DAVID: There must've been a reason. If you'd had the right doctors. . . .

J.B.: She had doctors, nurses, hospitals . . . the works! There was no reason for it in the world!

(Quieter.) Nine years . . . And now I can't lay off. One night, I was almost dead, I was blind in my room; a cousin of mine, worked with me on the paper . . . I was on the financial page that time . . . he used to come and sit with me. He brought Lennie that night and left her there. She just sat there and prayed all night. She was good to me, always a good woman. I made up my mind I was going to pay her back. They wanted eighteen thousand dollars for the store here. I played the market, studied it day and night. In four months I had my money. Look at my house, is there anything more beautiful? My lawn, my flowers. . . .

DAVID: All right, J.B., stop it now.

J.B.: It took me fourteen years to convince her I could live without drinking. This year she believed me. Look—

(Holds out his new ring.) It's like I just got married! What's it all for, what's it all about? You struggle, you plan, you work, for what?

(Gets up, looks around blindly.) They'll wipe my name off my mail box like I never lived! Look at me standing here drunk a mile from my house!

(He pushes in all directions as they try to seat him.)

DAVID (He pushes *J.B.* into the chair): I don't want to hear any more of that, you understand me? Now shut up!

GUS: Be quiet, David. . . .

DAVID (To *Gus*): He had no right to start drinkin' in the first place!

J.B. (Almost pleading and yet explaining what to him could not have been otherwise): My Celia, my little wife . . . nine years alone. . . .

DAVID: Then you should've stopped when you saw it was no good for you!

I got no pity for you. A man gets what he deserves. Get a hold of yourself now.

(He turns his back and walks left to window.)

J.B. (Quietly, after a pause): When a man is young everything seems possible. But you make a mistake, and you never know it, but all the time it's growing still and quiet until it winds around to meet you like a long snake, and pulls you down. And you somehow never really know why.

DAVID: Your mistake ain't a mystery to me any more, J.B. It's clear as daylight . . . your whole life is clear as daylight now.

J.B.: Sure. Now it's clear. Twenty years later everything is clear . . .

DAVID: It should've been clear then. You were ruining your own life. People get what they deserve. I believe that now. You end up with what you deserve inside.

J.B.: Yeh, heh? Meaning no harm, Dave . . . where are your children?

DAVID (Turns slowly): I'm going to have my children.

J.B.: How do you know?

DAVID (With anger growing from his yearning): Because I want them! Because there ain't a good reason why I shouldn't have them!

J.B.: There has to be a good reason, heh?

DAVID: Every time!

J.B.: Who says?

DAVID: I say! Otherwise anything can happen . . . anything at any time! The most terrible things . . . and you'd have to bow your head and say, "Amen, it was right that it happened." That can't be. There's be no use living if . . .

(Enter *Shory.*)

SHORY: Did I hear an argument?

DAVID (Slight pause): The argument's over.

(He goes to left window, looks out.) Where the hell is that scout!

J.B.: Let me ask you something you used to ask me.

DAVID (With increasing tension): I don't want to talk about it any more.

(Slight pause.) He said he'd be here seven o'clock. You'd think a man would have some regard for his own word.

SHORY: What's it to you? What are you sweatin' about?

DAVID (Without turning. His voice growing louder): It's a lot to me. A man waits all those years and now he keeps him waiting.

J.B. (Anxiously; almost to himself): How do I look? Bad?

DAVID: Don't go home. She'll raise hell.

J.B. (Makes his way to *David*): Well look, don't be angry with me, Davey. . . .

DAVID (Bursting out): You ought to be ashamed of yourself; you make me mad. You got everything in the world, what the hell are you walking around drunk for!

J.B.: It happened, that's all. Look, if there's a reason for everything, why did Gus fail?

DAVID (Stops moving. His eyes meet *Gus's*): I don't know.

GUS: I am German. It's very simple. They remember the war here.

DAVID: Go on.

(He turns and walks tensely to the window.)

J.B. (To *David*): Well? Answer that question. What's the answer?

DAVID: I don't know. He had no right to fail.

GUS: Right! Again "right." What has justice got to do with this? I had a bad location. . . .

DAVID (Bursts out): It's better than mine! You were right at the junction. Every car comin' into town had to pass your place. And they came to me. Why?

(Turns away.) Why?

GUS: You were a good man with an engine, that's why!

DAVID: Don't make me laugh!

GUS: Make you laugh! You're a good mechanic, as good as they come!

DAVID: Not good enough to fix a Marmon though.

(*J.B.* looks at him.) And God knows how many other cars I botched up before you took over for me!

GUS: If you botched them up they'd have come back complaining; did they complain?

DAVID: They're afraid to look silly! They think I know everything around here!

(Looks out window.) God damn that scout! I should've dragged him here by the neck!

J.B. (Quietly, shocked): Dave. What'd you say about a Marmon?

GUS (Quickly): Nothing, he didn't mean a Marmon specially. . . .

(*David* turns to window, J.B. watching him. Suddenly he swings around.)

DAVID (To *J.B.*): I meant a Marmon. Yes, by God, I meant a Marmon seven-passenger sedan!

GUS (Warning): David!

DAVID: I been turning my back on it for three years and I can't stand it any more.

GUS: It's nobody's business!

DAVID: It's time somebody knew what I am!

(Silence.) I never fixed Dan Dibble's Marmon, J.B.

(*J.B.* turns dumbfounded to *Gus*; trembling with fear and relief.) Yeh. I lied. Gus fixed the Marmon. That's why I stalled you six months before I borrowed the money for the new shop. I was waiting for him to run me out of business. I was sure. It had to be. He's the best mechanic I ever saw.

(Slight pause.) Once, twice, three times—everything I ever touched turned out fine. Fourteen thousand dollars in the bank.

(Laughs emptily.) I'm "worth" fourteen thousand dollars . . . and he ain't worth a cent. What does it?

(Goes back to the window.) What?

GUS: It's very simple. . . .

DAVID: Don't tell me again it's because I'm good! I know what I know . . . and it ain't much! Not enough to make me the owner of a shop like that, and a farm like this one, and a lime quarry standing sixty foot in the air and everything else I got title to! *I ain't that good!*

(Pause.) There must be a reason for these things, a reason a man can wrap his hands around and control. *There has got to be a reason!*

SHORY: Jee*esus!* Look at you, a young guy, got the world by the short hairs and you're chewin' your brains out, for what!

(Points to *Gus.*) Here's the weight around your neck! Look at him, tell him to go back where he came from. You beat him, he's licked, what's he hangin' around for!

DAVID: I didn't beat him and he ain't licked, and I don't want that from you!

SHORY: Since the day he pulled into this town you been apologizing for yourself!

(To *Gus.*) What do you want here?

DAVID: You got no right to talk to him like that. He works here, that's what he wants . . . !

GUS: Sssh!

(Holds up his hands.) For the first time, I must agree with you, Shory.

(To *David.*) I am no good for you any more, I think. It happens that way many times with people. If you cannot find a reason why I failed, and this concerns you so much, then it is time to go.

DAVID: You're not going.

GUS: Not tonight. But be prepared for it.

DAVID: No, I'm not preparing for it at all. I'm going to find out why you failed, I'm going to find the reason for everything that came to me. . . .

SHORY: Never. You'll die tryin'. A man is a jellyfish.

DAVID: Stop sayin' that, will ya! You drive me crazy with that all these years!

SHORY: The truth hurts! It's the truth, you damn fool!

DAVID (Suddenly strides to the desk, takes a packet wrapped in a rubber band off it, and tosses it into *Shory's* lap): This says it ain't.

(They all crane over *Shory* at the packet.) Go ahead, read them. Show me the jellyfish couldn't done that.

(The men read the contents.)

J.B. (Bent over *Shory*): Telephone bills?

DAVID (Walking up and down, glances through the window once): Yeh, telephone bills. Everybody said Pat had bad luck. That was it. Luck. Bad luck. . . .

GUS: Detroit! You called Detroit!

(They all look up.)

DAVID: Eleven times. I made up my mind once and for all to find out why that man was hanging fire all these years.

(To *Shory.*) Bad luck, you said. Jellyfish, you said. Well, I brought the scout. I took Pat's luck in my hands and I smashed it!

SHORY: So what does this prove?

DAVID: I ain't sure yet. I ain't sure. But it may be that a man—say, a man like me—can live a whole life from the beginning to the end, all nice and sweet and even, if he just looks sharp, sharp as hell, and grabs onto what's going to smash him down before it gets started.

GUS: What are you talking about? What is going to smash you down?

(Enter *Hester.*)

HESTER (With mock disgust): Well, now you can go back gettin' drunk, J.B. I talked to the doctor and she's all right.

J.B. (Gets up): What was the matter? What happened?

HESTER: Just a spell, she kinda went under for a while. But the doctor says she'll be all right. You want a drink? There's plenty inside.

J.B.: Don't tease me, you monkey girl! Gimme a kiss, baby!

(He spreads his arms out and goes toward her.)

HESTER (As she backs toward door; to *Gus* and *David*): What are you staying in here for? Everybody's in the parlor!

J.B. (His arms hooked over his head, advancing on her): Dracula! Rape, lechery, destruction!

(He lunges at her.)

HESTER (With a mock scream): Eek!

(She starts through the door on the run, when *Amos* comes rushing in.)

AMOS: Hey, he's here, he's here! Get out, get out! We're goin' to talk in here! Pop's bringin' him in from the car!

DAVID: Out everybody! Come on!

J.B.: Knock him dead, Ame!

(They all push out of the room.)

AMOS: He came all the way from Burley in a taxicab!

DAVID (At the door. Only he and *Amos* in the room; crossing his fingers): Here's to you, Ame, all the luck in the world.

AMOS: I always knew he'd come! 'Cause I'm good, I'm probably great! God, it's happening just like it ought've!

(*David* laughs with joy . . . his eye catches something on the floor. His laugh stops. He goes downstage and picks up the phone bills he had shown *J.B.*)

DAVID: I better put these away.

(He crosses to the desk, puts the bills away.)

AMOS: Gosh, I ain't even scared!

(Enter *Patterson* with *Augie Belfast*, a big Irishman dressed well.)

PAT (As they come from the corridor): . . . thought we'd give him a party. This is Frieber's house. . . .

(Sees *David*.) Oh, here he is. Dave, this is Augie Belfast of the Detroit Tigers.

(To *Augie*.) Dave Frieber. Old friend of Amos's.

AUGIE (Shaking): That's all right, howdedo.

DAVID: Hello. Well, I'll . . . see you fellers later.

AUGIE: Sure, we won't be long.

(Exit *David*, shutting door behind him.) Sit down, sit down, don't stand on ceremony with me. I'm Augie Belfast.

(*Amos* sits on bed. *Patterson* in a chair.) Have a peanut?

PAT: No, thanks, we been eatin' all day.

(A dim light makes visible the corridor outside the door. *David* is seen, standing motionless, listening.) Why don't you take your coat off?

AUGIE (Lays his hat on bureau, tossing a nut into his mouth): No, I travel a lot. I live in this overcoat. It's a habit . . . like smoking.

(He paces constantly, chewing, swabbing his teeth with his tongue.) Loosen up, don't stand in awe of me. I want this heart to heart.

PAT: Oh, I'm . . . I'm perfectly comfortable. Go right ahead.

AUGIE (Never, or rarely looking at them): Yeh, all right, Amos . . . ?

(He says nothing for a long moment, keeps moving about.)

AMOS (A whisper): Ya?

AUGIE: Amos, how long you been pitchin'?

AMOS: Well, about. . . .

(Turns to *Pat*.)

PAT: Steadily since he's been eight years old.

AUGIE (Nods; pause): I guess you know he's a damn fine pitcher.

PAT (Comfortably): We like to think so around here.

AUGIE: Yeh, he's steady, he's good. Got a nice long arm, no nerves in that arm. He's all right.

(All the time thinking of something else, pacing.)

PAT: Well, you see, I've had him practising down the cellar against a target. Dug the cellar out deeper so he could have room after he grew so tall.

AUGIE: Yeh, I know, I heard about that. Man sitting next to me this afternoon was telling me. Look, Mr. Beeves. . . .

(He straddles a chair, folds his arms on its back, facing them.) I want you to have confidence in what I say. I'm Augie Belfast, if you know anything about Augie Belfast you know he don't bull. There's enough heartbreak in this business without a bull-thrower causin' any more. In toto, I don't string an athlete along. Pitchin' a baseball to me is like playin' the piano well, or writin' beautiful literature, it gets my profoundest respect. So try to feel that I'm givin' you the last word because I am.

(*Pat* nods a little, hardly breathing.) I have watched many thousands of boys, Mr. Beeves. I been whackin' the bushes for material for a long time. You done a fine job on Amos. He's got his stance, he's got his pace, he's got his control down to a pinpoint. He's almost original sometimes. When it comes to throwin' a ball, he's all there. Now.

(Slight pause.) When I saw him two years ago, I said. . . .

PAT (Electrically): You were *here* before?

AUGIE: Oh yeh, I meant to tell you. I came to see him last year, too. . . .

PAT: Why didn't you let me know? I would have. . . .

AUGIE: I don't bull anybody along, Mr. Beeves. There was no point my talkin' to you because he wasn't ready for big league work. I only talk to a man when I can tell him yes, or I can tell him no. Last year and the year before, I couldn't say yes or no.

PAT (Quietly): Can you now?

(Slight pause.)

AUGIE: I can now, Mr. Beeves. When I got back to Detroit last year I told them what I saw. Their answer was, if he's got what you say, Augie, give him a try.

PAT (Softly): Is that so!

AUGIE: In reply, Mr. Beeves, I said; wait, leave the boy to bake. Because there was one thing I couldn't understand. I understand it today, but I couldn't then. When the bases are clear, Mr. Beeves, and there's nobody on, your boy is terrific. . . . Now wait a minute, let me say rather that he's good, very good . . . I don't want to say an untruth, your boy is good when nobody's on. But as soon as a man gets on base and starts rubbin' his spikes in the dirt and makin' noise behind your boy's back, something happens to him. His control goes, his pace goes, he loses his head. I seen it once, I seen it twice, I seen it every time the bases get loaded. And once the crowd starts howlin', your boy, Mr. Beeves, is floatin' somewhere out in paradise.

(Dead silence.) I couldn't understand it. I absolutely couldn't get the angle on it. Here's a boy with a terrific . . . well, let's not say terrific, let's say a damn good long arm. But not an ounce of base-brains. There is something in him that prevents him from playin' the bases. . . .

PAT: I know, I've been drilling him. . . .

AUGIE: I know you've been drilling him. But in three years there's been no improvement. In fact, this year he's worse in that respect than last year. Why? Today I found the answer.

(Gradually the corridor outside the room fills with tiptoeing people—*J.B.*, *Gus*, *Shory* and *Hester* cluster around the door.)

PAT (Softly): You did?

AUGIE: The guy sitting next to me mentions about him pitchin' down the cellar since he was nine years old. That was it! Follow me now. In the cellar there is no crowd. In the cellar he knows exactly what's behind his back. In the cellar, in toto, your boy is home. He's only got to concentrate on that target, his mind is trained to take in that one object, just the target. But once he gets out on a wide ball-field, and a crowd is yelling in his ears, and there's two or three men on bases jumpin' back and forth behind him his mind has got to do a lot of things at once, he's in a strange place, he gets panicky; he gets paralyzed, he gets mad at the base runners and he's through! From that minute he can't pitch worth a nickel bag of peanuts!

(He gets up, pulls down his vest. *Patterson* sits dumb, *Amos* staring at nothing.) I got to make a train.

PAT (Slowly rises. As though in a dream): I didn't want to waste the winters, that's why I trained him down the cellar.

AUGIE (Thoughtfully): Yeh, that's just where you made your mistake, Mr. Beeves.

PAT: But . . . that was my plan. I didn't want to waste the winters. Down the cellar . . . it seemed like such a good idea!

AUGIE: But it was a mistake.

PAT: But how could it be? I would have known it was a mistake. . . . I been doing it thirteen years!

AUGIE: Yeh, I know. It was a very big mistake.

(Pause.)

PAT: Well . . . you can take that out of him? Your coaches and . . . everything?

AUGIE: There's no coach in the world can take out a boy's brain and set it back thirteen years. Your boy is crippled up here.

(Taps his temple.) I'm convinced.

PAT: But if you coached him right, if you drilled him day after day. . . .

AUGIE: It would take a long, long time, and I personally don't believe he'll ever get rid of it.

PAT: You can't . . . you can't try him, eh?

AUGIE: I know how you feel, Mr. Beeves, but I am one man who will not take a boy out of his life when I know in my heart we're going to throw him away like a wet rag.

PAT (For a long time he stands staring): He has no life.

AUGIE (Bends closer to hear): Eh?

PAT: He doesn't know how to do anything else.

AUGIE (Nods with sympathy): I guess that was another mistake.

(He starts to turn away to go.)

PAT (As though to call him back somehow): I believed if he concentrated . . . concentration . . . you see I myself always jumped from one thing to another and never got anywhere, and I thought. . . .

AUGIE: Yeh . . . when it works concentration is a very good principle.

(Takes a breath.) Well, lots of luck.

(Still unable to believe, *Pat* can't speak.) 'Bye, Amos.

(The light goes down, blacking out the people in the corridor.)

(*Amos* nods very slightly.)

(*David* opens the door slowly and comes in, shutting it behind him. He raises his hand and takes a breath to address *Augie*. But his hand hangs in air, and he looks helplessly, beseechingly, from *Pat* and *Amos* to *Augie*.)

(To *David*.) I know. It's a pity. But after all. . . .

(He speaks to all.) Nobody gets everything he wants. That's life, ain't it?

(He looks at them all, nods, tips his hand a little, and goes quietly out.)

(There is a long silence. *Pat* stands staring into space. Gradually *Amos* stirs, rises from the bed, his eyes fastened to his father. His breathing deepens, his chest rises and falls as though he were about to spring at *Pat*. *Pat* turns slowly to him from the door. *Amos* is rigid, his fists clenched at his sides.)

PAT (Softly, really questioning): He can be wrong, too, can't he?

(*Amos* silent, his face filling with hate.) Can't he be wrong?

(No reply.) He can, can't he?

AMOS (A whiplike shout): No, he can't be!

PAT: But everybody makes mistakes. . . .

AMOS (With a cry he grabs *Pat* by the collar and shakes him violently back and forth): Mistakes! Mistakes! Mistakes!

DAVID (Trying to break his grip): Leave him alone! Let him go! Amos, let him go!

AMOS (Amid his own and *Pat's* weeping): You liar! I'll kill you, you little fake, *you liar!*

(With a new burst of violence he starts forcing *Pat* backward and down to the floor. *Gus* comes in as *David* locks an arm around *Amos's* neck and jerks him from *Pat*, who falls to the floor.) Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

(With a great thrust *David* throws *Amos* to the bed and stands over him, fists raised.)

DAVID: Stay there! Don't get up! You'll fight me, Amos!

PAT (Scurrying to his feet, and taking *David* away from the bed): Don't, don't fight!

(He turns quickly, pleadingly, to *Amos*, who is beginning to sob on the bed.) Amos, boy, boy. . . .

(*Amos* lies across the bed and sobs violently. *Pat* leans over and pats his head.) Boy, boy. . . .

(*Amos* swings his arm out blindly and hits *Pat* across the chest. *David* starts toward them but *Pat* remains over him, patting his back.) Come on, boy, please, boy, stop now, stop, Amos;

look, Ame, look, I'll get Cleveland down here, I'll go myself, I'll bring a man. Ame, listen, I did what I could, a man makes mistakes, he can't figure on everything. . . .

(Begins shaking *Amos* who continues sobbing.) Ame, stop it!

(He stands and begins shouting over *Amos's* sobbing.) I admit it, I admit it, Ame, I lie, I talk too much, I'm a fool, I admit it, but look how you pitch, give me credit for that, give me credit for something!

(Rushes at *Amos* and turns him over.) Stop that crying! God Almighty, what do you want me to do! I'm a fool, what can I do!

DAVID (Wrenches him away from the bed. Stands over *Amos*): Listen, you!

(Leans over and pulls *Amos* by the collar to a sitting position. *Amos* sits limply, sobbing.) He made a mistake. That's over with. You're going to drill on base play. You got a whole life. One mistake can't ruin a life. Pat'll go to Cleveland. He'll go to New York. . . .

(*Hester* enters quietly.) The man can be wrong. Look at me! The man can be wrong, you understand!

AMOS (Shakes his head): He's right.

(*David* releases him and stands looking down at him. *Amos* gets up slowly, goes to a chair and sits.) He's right. I always knew I couldn't play the bases. Everything the man said was right. I'm dumb, that's why. I can't figure nothin'.

(Looks up at *Pat*.) He wouldn't let me learn how to figure. There wasn't no time, he said, no time for nothin' but throwin' that ball. Let 'em all laugh, he said, you don't need to know how to figure. I knew all the time I was doin' wrong. He wouldn't listen. He knew it all. He knows everything! Well, this is one time I know something. I ain't gonna touch a baseball as long as I live!

PAT (Frantically): Amos, you don't know what you're saying . . . !

AMOS: I couldn't ever stand out on a diamond again! I can't do it! I know! I can't!

(Slight pause.)

I ain't goin' to let you kid me any more. I'm through.

(He rises. *Pat* sobs into his hands.)

DAVID (As *Amos* keeps shaking his head in denial of everything): What do you mean, through? People don't bury themselves over one mistake. . . . It's an accident, it couldn't be helped; it's the way he figured, it happened to be wrong! Amos, you got to lay your hands on the mistake and twist it till it's right again! You can't lay down, you'll kill him! Listen to me, stop shaking your head—who gets what he wants in this world!

AMOS: You. Only you. So you can't even talk.

DAVID: Me. Me! Walk around this house. Go to my shop. Look in the corners of everything I own and find me my children. Where are my children? And what good is everything without them? You don't know what a hole it makes in your life, what a laughingstock it makes of everything you do in the world! There is no man I ever knew who didn't carry a curse. J.B., Shory, Gus, your father, you, me—the world is made that way as if a law was written in the sky somewhere. Nobody escapes! I almost believed I was special in the world, but tonight I know what's waiting for me, and I'm not afraid. I don't lay down, I don't die, Amos, because I'll have no kids! That's the law, now we're all the same, all of us the same; nobody escapes!

HESTER (Indignantly and with alarm): Why do you talk that way? You're *not* the same as they are!

DAVID (As though a dam within him had broken): Hess, the truth is the truth! I'm no different from anybody else, I never wanted to be! Now I can live in peace with myself, and build and buy and never be afraid of it all coming down! Face it. Hester, this is our curse, to live all alone. Why do you cry? Now we know; it's like being free!

HESTER (Insistently, quietly): You're not the same as they are, Davey. (Slight pause.) You have no curse.

(Silence.)

DAVID: . . . Hester, you. . . .

HESTER (Staring at him tearfully): I wanted to wait till the scout signed him up. And then . . . when the house was full of noise and cheering, I'd stand with you on the stairs high over them all, and tell them you were going to have a son. Oh, Davey, I saw you so proud . . . !

(Pause.)

DAVID: . . . I am, I am now. . . .

HESTER: No, you don't want him. I don't know what's happened to you, you don't want him now!

DAVID (With a chill of horror freezing him): Don't say that! Hester, you mustn't . . . !

(*David* pulls her into his arms and kisses her neck and hair.)

HESTER: You've got to want him, Davey.

(She holds him away from her.) You will be proud, won't you?

DAVID: Yes, I swear, I swear!

(He grabs her hand and kisses it. She looks mystifiedly into his face, turns and goes out. *David* stands looking at the door.)

AMOS (With half a smile): Nobody escapes . . . except you.

(He walks to the door.)

PAT: Amos, where are you goin'?

(*David* turns away.)

AMOS: When I get there, I'll let you know.

PAT (Calling uncertainly—his voice faltering): Amos! Boy! Amos!

(He waits. There is no answer. A sob threatens him. Without turning he goes out.)

(Pause.)

GUS: Well . . . the party is over, and the guests go home. Good night.

DAVID (Steps to the door and stands against it. Stares long at *Gus*. When he speaks it is as though he were reading from a scroll unwinding within him): You'll come with me tomorrow. We'll go to the lawyer and I'll sign the shop over to you.

(*Gus* is silent. He does not move.) I don't want it on my name any more. I'll take forty per cent, you take sixty. But from now on, it's on your name.

(*Gus* is silent.) After we finish with the lawyer I want you to come with me out near Chelsea. There's a gas station on the main highway. I want you to look at it.

GUS: What do I know about a gas station?

DAVID: I'm going to buy it. I want somebody along.

(*Gus* is silent.) From there we'll go to Harry Bucks' place and you'll help me load the truck with mink. I'm taking fifty to start with.

GUS: Also on my name?

DAVID: No. Only the shop's on your name. The gas station is for my kid . . . be on Hester's name till it's born. Same with the tractor agency, quarry shares and the farm. All for Hester. I gotta do a lot of things for Hester now. I just want the mink for myself. The rest don't belong to me any more. You understand? Got nothing to do with me from now on.

GUS: I understand everything. But they still belong to you.

DAVID (With the deepest conviction): No. . . .

GUS: Oh, but they do, David!

DAVID (A strange gentle stillness is in his voice): No, you don't understand. Suppose the gas station fails, or the quarry goes down, that's . . . that's my kid's hard luck and I'll make it up to him. If the farm goes, or the agency, why that's all Hester's. And the shop—that's yours. So if any one of them goes, don't you see?—it won't pull them all down with it like it would if they were all connected to me. Can't you see that, Gus?

GUS: I . . . I see everything, Dave. Listen to me; you must work. . . .

DAVID (Nods): The mink. That's where I work. They're all mine; nobody's going to touch them but me. They'll cost me a fortune; if they live it's my doin', and if they die . . . I'll know for sure.

GUS: What will you know if the mink die?

DAVID (Very quietly): That nothing came to me because of what I am, what I myself am worth; and that everything can go smashing down the same way it came—for no reason. I'm going to measure myself, Gus, once and for all. And mink can measure a man. Funny, ain't it, that I never thought of this before? It seems . . . so *natural* now. Don't it to you?

(*Gus's* face is immobile.) I mean, don't you sometimes feel that something big . . . is about to go?

(*David* stands smiling questioningly, but with a new inner calm, as . . .)

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE: The living-room of David's house. Early evening in the following March.

ON THE RISE: *Hester* is seen sitting on the couch mending a pair of her stockings. Against the windows a hard rain, almost hail, is driving. Thunder rolls not far away. Her manner is that of a woman trying to occupy time rather than accomplishing a task. A clap of thunder sounds overhead. She is forced to put down her work and get up. She goes to the windows, right, and looks out at a sharp angle, as though to discern something outside. A flash of lightning seems to strike in her face, illuminating the room. She starts with shock, looks anxiously out of the window for an instant, then turns, goes to the stairs and hurries up. Presently *David* hurries in from outside through the door at left. His black raincoat, galoshes and work hat are drenched. There is a faint hue of pink on his hands and hardened bloodstains on his coat. He has been running. His face bears a strained, anxious frown. He crosses to the stairs, mounts the landing, but goes no farther; looking up, he listens for a sound.

DAVID (Hesitantly): Hester?

(He waits a moment. Louder.) Hess?

(Pause. With great anxiety.) Hester . . . ?

(Seeing her appear above him, he comes down from the landing and waits a few feet from it. She descends with what seems calm self-possession which is itself a measure of her annoyance. Their glances cross. With her arms wrapped about her she walks right to windows and looks out. He turns after a moment and goes toward the door, left.)

HESTER (Dully): Must you go out there again? Must you . . . all night? Every night?

DAVID (Halts and turns guiltily toward her): The storm, Hess. It's driving them crazy . . . I just came in to see about the baby.

HESTER: That lightning was miles away.

DAVID (Glances out windows): It seemed close. I think it is coming closer.

(Turns to her.) Did he wake? Did he cry?

HESTER: Best way to find out is to go up and look at him.

DAVID (Holds forth his hands): I been grinding fish for the feed, Hess.

HESTER: Wash your hands. I bought you that hard soap especially. Seems to me a man would want to hold his son at least once. It just seems natural to me.

DAVID: But I did. . . .

HESTER: Not once. Never since he's been born.

DAVID (Almost pleading): Look at my hands. How can I . . . ?

HESTER: It's not your hands! That soap takes the blood off!

(A clap of thunder sounds overhead. *David's* head goes up. Almost involuntarily he goes toward the door.) Every night alone, Davey. Momma is nobody to talk to. The house is turning gray again, like when my father was here. Don't leave me alone all the time.

DAVID: Just till the whelping's over, Hess. What'd I work for the whole year?—only to bring out these litters. . . .

(Looks toward windows.) And now it's got to hail. It's driving them crazy just when they're ready. Just the night they're ready!

(He goes to windows and stands.)

HESTER: But, Davey, what's the use of going out there?

(She tries to laugh.) You talk as if it was hailing on purpose.

DAVID (Looking at the storm): Sometimes . . . you can't help believing that. You can't help it. It was so nice all month . . . and just this night, one night in the whole year when I need it quiet, the sky opens up. There isn't a noise in the world that isn't sounding tonight. Just tonight.

HESTER (Feeling his conviction . . .

nervously): Don't go out again. You stay here and I'll make you some tea and we'll go to bed.

DAVID: I can't leave them all night. I'll have to go out there.

HESTER: But, Davey, you're not God. You can't stop the hail and the thunder!

DAVID (With mounting feeling): Does a man have to be God before he can get what's coming to him? Must you be God before that happens?

HESTER: But it's hailing. If you lose them. . . .

DAVID (Quickly, as though it were completely out of the question): I *won't* lose them!

HESTER: But it won't be your fault!

DAVID: That's why! It's not my fault and I won't lose them! If I'd made a mistake, all right, I could understand it. Patterson made a mistake, J.B. made a mistake, Shory made a mistake. But I didn't. Every ounce of feed that went into their mouths I took apart and weighed and smelled before they ate it. Fourteen, fifteen hours a day, every day for a year I've stood over them, cutting sickness out of their hides, holding them back from killing each other, watching how they walk, how they blink their eyes, how they sleep . . . *I didn't make any mistakes!* I labored for them and they're mine! By any rule in the world I deserve those litters!

(As though in a fury at the storm he turns directly to her.) If they go tonight, Hester, I'll . . . !

(Breaks off.)

HESTER (Pounding on it): What? What'd you want to say? What if they go tonight? What would happen?

DAVID (He stares at nothing: with a new depth in his voice): Don't you see that anything could happen, the most terrible thing . . . ?

(Stares at her.) Everything I know how to do, every last ounce of my wisdom is alive in those cages. Whatever I am is out there . . . if that doesn't add up to something sure, then. . . .

(With an all-destroying throw of his hand he turns to go out. She takes him and turns him about.)

HESTER: But, Davey . . . dear, you keep forgetting we've got all those other things if the mink go down. The gas station, and the quarry, and. . . .

DAVID: Don't you believe anything I tell you any more?

HESTER: Of course I believe. . . .

DAVID: You don't. I've told you a thousand times . . . I'm losing money on the other things.

(With hurt insistence.) I'm losing. I *told* you that! It's only the mink can pull me out. Can't you understand that?

HESTER (She stares at him a moment, then walks from him): You've told me that a lot of times, Davey.

DAVID: And it doesn't seem to make any difference.

HESTER: It did. I wanted to know if I ought to economize . . . I just wanted to be sure.

(Turns to him.) So I called J.B. yesterday.

(Slight pause.) He's taking care of your books, Davey, he ought to know. He says you're not losing any money. None at all.

DAVID (Now with growing temper): He did, eh? And what else did he tell you?

HESTER: Why, is there anything else?
DAVID: J.B. is not going to tell you the truth about me losing money, Hester.
HESTER: How can you say that?
DAVID: Because I know it. He won't tell *me* the truth.
HESTER: But why not?
DAVID (Furiously): Because he thinks I. . . .

(His throat closes. He goes toward the door quickly.)

HESTER: What does he think?

(She goes quickly to him, turns him around.) What am I supposed to think? Davey, there's something happening to you. . . .
DAVID (He lovingly, almost pleadingly, takes her hand and kisses it): Hess, please . . . !
HESTER: J.B. swears you're not losing money. He swears it, Davey. . . .
DAVID: He's lying to you . . . he's trying to make you feel good. The same way he lies to me when I ask him.
HESTER (With her first real fear she breaks from him, stamps her foot. With a cry): But it's not *like* him, Davey!
DAVID: Then what are you saying?

(With a roar.) What are you saying? That I'm crazy?
HESTER: Davey!!
DAVID: You too? He thinks that and now he's got you believing it! He won't admit it to me that I'm losing because he's afraid I'm cracking up. That's the story. Now do you believe I'm losing when I say I am or do you believe J.B.?
HESTER (Out of shock she goes to him): . . . . I believe you, Davey.

(Embracing him.) Of course I believe you. I believe you, Davey. . . .
DAVID (Almost weeping now): I don't want you to worry, Hess. I promised you'd live like a queen, remember? It's going to be that way. Don't worry, don't think about me. I bought you the car, take a drive tomorrow . . . shop, buy whatever you want, buy things, Hess. I love you so much. Just bear with me, Hess . . . just tonight and a few days. . . . I swear I love you!
HESTER: I know you love me, Davey.
DAVID: Then trust me, will you? Don't ask . . . don't ask me any more.

(A flash of lightning illuminates the room. He lets go of her and finds himself indicating upstairs.) You better see . . . see if he's all right.

(As though suddenly afraid he has revealed himself, shame seems to seep into him and a beseeching not to question him, but. . . .)

HESTER (Suddenly about to cry, and intensely curious): Davey . . . why do you keep doing that? Why are you so afraid for him . . . ? Davey, there's so much I don't understand!

(As though it were simply impossible for him to even consider answering this, he turns with set face—not angrily, but methodically—and opens the door and goes out. Perplexed and in a state bordering on fright, she stands a moment in the doorway watching him go away. Grown cold, she comes in and closes the door. Presently she goes to the phone at center, picks it up.)

HESTER: Nine-one, ring 4, please. Hello, this is Hester. How are you, John? Oh, pretty good. Could you come over tonight, John? Well I am worried. I want to talk to you once and for all. Please, will you?

(Knocking on door, left.) Just a minute, somebody's knocking . . . all right. I'm sorry it's so awful out, but try to make it right away, huh? Please . . . ya.

(She hangs up and goes toward the door as it opens and *Gus* enters, dressed for rain and drenched.)

GUS: Hello!
HESTER (As though relieved): Oh, Gus! I'm so glad you came!
GUS (As he would to a little girl): In that case, so am I. Where's David, still making with his monkey business so late?
HESTER (Hanging up his things): What's got you out in this weather? Davey's outside.

(Goes to couch and takes up sewing things.)

GUS (Warming his hands and rubbing his body against the inside of his clothes): I am being lonely. Every March I got lonely for a few days. In April is my birthday.
HESTER (Laughs): You're like a woman about your age.
GUS: Yes. A sad occasion, my birthday.
(Sitting, he scratches his knees.) My knees itch. In the old country that's a sign.
HESTER: Really? What does it mean?
GUS: It means . . . you will soon be praying.
(Looks about the room.) This house is such a pleasure to me. I was almost in bed, and I just felt I had to come over and visit Hester and David. Imagine! Your son will grow up, he will call me probably Uncle Gus. Me! I look forward to this like a career. Uncle Gus!—a hobo like me! It makes for me a future!
(Laughs.) From a bachelor I worked myself way up to a relative.
HESTER (Curiously, lightly): Why did you come?
GUS (Easily): Why?
(Looks toward windows.) The hail, I suppose, and the rain.
(Looks at her.) The mink . . . this doesn't agree with them, I understand.
HESTER (Looks at her dress): Well, no, it isn't very good.
GUS: I felt. . . .
(He plays his fingers in the air.) . . . you know. He needs help? Something?
HESTER: You know he'd never let anybody near those cages.
GUS (Studies her manner): Yes. . . .
(Takes a breath, dips into his jacket and takes out a sheaf of papers.) I have here a mortgage.
(She looks up quickly.) What's the matter?
HESTER: Nothing. You said a mortgage . . . what . . ?
GUS: On the shop. He would like to borrow money on the shop. He's been after me the past week to sign it. I'm a partner and I have to sign before he can. . . .
HESTER (Hopefully): Then . . . he *is* losing somewhere!
GUS: Oh, then he told you. I wondered.
HESTER: Why wouldn't he tell me?
GUS: Oh . . . I think most men are a little ashamed when they are not making so good . . . especially David. He loves you very much, you know. What I was wondering, though, was where he was losing his money. Do you know?

HESTER: I . . . was just going to ask you that.

GUS (Laughs lightly, but she does not. His laughter vanishes. He holds her in his gaze until it is clear she will not speak): Why don't you believe he is losing money, Hester?

HESTER (With protest): Of course. I do.

(Seeing his unbelief.) I mean I don't see why he'd go around saying he was losing if he wasn't, I. . . .

(She stops . . . staring.) I just realize . . . from the first time I heard him say it I took it for granted that it was only . . . in his mind. Isn't that terrible of me?

(She gets up in agitation.) He *must* be losing somewhere. And I didn't believe him . . . I don't know what could have come over me . . . !

GUS (Searchingly): Why didn't you believe him? What makes you feel it was only in his mind?

HESTER: Well, I just. . . .

(She stops, looks at him.) Do you think it's . . . only in his mind?

GUS (Quickly): Oh, no, I believe him absolutely, but . . .

HESTER: No, you don't. You wouldn't have come here in this rain otherwise.

GUS (Seeing her fright rising): Now, Hester, please. . . .

HESTER (With great force): Why don't you believe him?

(He sits looking at her, not answering.) Gus, I'm his wife. What don't I know? There's something I don't know!

(Pause.)

GUS (Finally): I don't believe him. No. Because until the night the baby was born he never mentioned taking losses. Only when he came out of your bedroom . . . this was the first time. In twenty minutes after he saw the baby he was speaking of losses. I couldn't understand it. It came out of him so . . . sudden, you know?

HESTER (After an instant she turns from him and goes to the windows, left, looks out): I called J.B. He'll be here right away.

GUS: He's coming here? That's very good. We can have it out.

HESTER: I suppose you've already asked him.

GUS: Well, yes, I did. And he said . . . there was no losses.

HESTER (Believing this furiously): J.B. can be a big fool sometimes, you know. He's always been so proud of Davey he won't admit he could even lose his breath, let alone money.

GUS: I was thinking the same. Actually.

HESTER (A strained laugh escapes her; she keeps moving near the windows): I don't know why I'm so upset about it, really. J.B.'s such an old momma cow about Davey . . . you'd think he'd take me seriously and answer my question, wouldn't you . . . ?

(Suddenly imperative but utterly controlled.) You don't have to go right away, do you? I mean . . . it's such a bad night.

GUS: I'll stay. Don't worry. Now sit down.

HESTER (Searching the road beyond the windows, moving, moving): Really, Gus, he doesn't sleep any more. I find him late at night walking the floor down here. He's losing on the gas station, he says, losing on the quarry. . . .

(Having thoroughly recalled the scene.) You'd think J.B. would stop

treating me like a sixteen-year-old and tell me what he was losing!
GUS: Sit down. He'll be here in a minute. You'll know.
HESTER: I could scream at him sometimes, I . . . .

(She stops, thinks a moment, turns about to *Gus.*) But, Gus . . . if it was all something that was only in his mind . . . if he's not really losing at all, why would he want to borrow money on the shop? That's something . . . real. I mean. . . .

(Slight pause.)

GUS: He really believes it, Hester. That I feel sure of.

(Pause.)

HESTER: Oh . . . then he *must* be losing!

(Headlights flash on the windows and she turns quickly.) Here's J.B.'s car!

(Clenching her hands now in mounting terror.) He must be losing, Gus! It can't be possible that the whole thing is . . . that Davey is . . . !
GUS (Goes to her): Now you just keep your head. There is nothing that can't be straightened out if you just . . . hold tight and. . . .

(Knocking on door.)

HESTER: Open it.

(As though in fear of what *J.B.* carries in him she goes to the couch at center and sits, as *Gus* opens the door, letting in *J.B.* Under his arm he carries two ledgers wrapped in newspapers.)

J.B.: Hullo, Gus.

(Puts on a smile as he gives *Gus* his coat.) How're you, baby?
HESTER: Come here, J.B., sit down.
J.B. (He and *Gus* come center. He lays books on a table): It's a night for cats. Cats you don't like. Dave in the house?
HESTER: No, he's outside. Sit down, will you?
J.B. (Genuinely distressed): Now, don't get excited, Baby. You're going to make me cry now . . . will you stop looking that way?

(To *Gus,* pointing at her.) Did I do that to her?
HESTER: John, I want to know if Davey's losing any money.
J.B. (Tenderly reaches over and takes her hands): Baby, this is no way for you to feel.
HESTER (Out of patience): Is he losing anything! Now, don't spare my feelings, John. I've got to know!
J.B. (Lets go of her hand): I can't figure it out either, Hester. But I'm telling you the truth. Dave has never lost a nickel in his life.

(Pause.)

HESTER (Softly): On anything at all? Think, John, is there anything at all?
J.B.: He's not losing on anything, Hester. He just made it up out of the clear blue sky, and by God, he believes it.

(She rises slowly. *Gus* seems about to reach out for her. She takes a few steps. Stops. Involuntarily she moves toward the stair landing. Stops. As though dazed she turns, quietly, and sees them as though for the first time.)

HESTER (As though it were the last sentence of her life): Davey . . . Davey's losing his mind.
GUS: Hester, you don't know, you can't say that. . . .

HESTER (Hating his obstructing solicitude): Please! He couldn't be right and believe that!

(She keeps pacing about the room—a cry enters her voice.) When did it happen? Why? He's such a good man, how did it happen?

GUS (With as ordinary a tone as he can manage): He should see a doctor, Hester.

HESTER (Furiously): Doctor! What does a doctor know about Davey?! It's Davey, isn't it? And it happened in this house, didn't it? What does a doctor know about this house? The answer is in this house; where is it? Where did it start? He was always so fine, he was always so. . . . Something made him afraid, that's all, he's afraid. He's afraid he's losing—why is he afraid? There's an answer to it. I lived with him every day, why don't I know the answer?

GUS: It is not so simple, Hester, you can't. . . .

HESTER (Suddenly she goes to *J.B.*): John.

J.B. (Pained and frightened): Take it easy, Baby, don't. . . .

HESTER: There's so many things I don't understand. Why did he give you the books to keep? I never understood that. What are you doing with Davey's books?

J.B.: Well, he just felt he wasn't up to keeping them, that's all. He . . .

HESTER: But why? What did he say? Tell me. When did he give them to you?

J.B.: The night the baby came.

HESTER (Struck): The night the . . . ?

(Breaks off. With horror.) What *happened* here that night?

J.B.: Well, nothing. The three of us were down here all night . . . just waiting, you know. And . . . .

HESTER: What did he say? What'd you talk about? I was upstairs, and the doctor was there . . . and you were down here, and you were waiting. What did he say?

J.B.: Well . . .

(Remembering.) . . . yeh. He talked about the mink while we were waiting. He was pretty chipper about everything. He was going to buy mink and more mink until he had the biggest ranch in the state. He was kinda . . . boasting, y'know? How he'd never lost and never would. He . . . felt pretty cocky, I guess.

HESTER: But you said he gave you the books that night. He couldn't have felt so cocky if he did that.

J.B.: Well, yeh, that was . . . later. Y'see he . . .

(Hesitates a moment as he begins to realize.) . . . he kinda changed.

(Remembering.) He was laying right here on the couch nice and easy, just chewing the fat. And then the doctor called him upstairs. And when he came down again . . . by God!

HESTER: What did he do?

J.B.: That's it, that's when it must've happened! He came down and stood looking outa that window there. Must've stood there a good half hour. We just sat waiting for him to get excited, y'know? It was very embarrassing. Here you'd had the kid and he was so *quiet*, y'know?

HESTER: Well, he must have said *something*, didn't he?

J.B.: Yeh . . .

(Reconstructing in his mind) . . . he turned around finally, and come over to me and he says, "J.B."—I remember the words,—"J.B.," he says, "I got a feeling I'm losing money and don't know it. Will you take care of the books for a while? I'm all mixed up." That's what he said. All of a sudden . . . the wind kinda blew out of him.

(Pause. *J.B.* sits open-mouthed, looking at her, waiting to see what she makes out of it. *Gus* is still, watching. She stands staring ahead.)

HESTER (Turning slowly to *Gus*): He didn't want the baby, did he?

J.B. (Shocked): Hester, for God's sake . . . !

HESTER (To *Gus*): He told you he didn't want him, didn't he!

GUS: It's impossible, Hester! You don't know how he wanted that child!

HESTER: He couldn't have wanted him! Not if that's the way he acted after he saw him!

(Reaching out toward that past.) He went upstairs, he was sure of everything. He came out of my room and suddenly everything was falling apart, everyth . . .

(She stops moving.) Oh . . . of course . . . you can't have everything . . . he always said it. The baby . . . he made up his mind—when he was sitting down here waiting . . . all the months I was carrying the baby he'd made up his mind that the baby was what he'd never have!

GUS: Now, Hester, don't be idiotic. . . .

HESTER (Rapidly, now): Don't you remember with Patterson after the scout went away? How he told Amos he couldn't ever have a child? Don't you remember how frightened he was when I told him? It's true!

GUS: But he wanted a child, I know this!

HESTER (Discovering one link after another): I know it too. But he never believed he could have it alive. A dead baby . . . he was sure of it. He always said that sooner or later there has to be a great smash down, a terrible thing happening. He always believed that. A dead baby. That would be his curse. Oh, I *know* him now! I've been asleep. He bought enough mink to keep three men busy. Why not? What else could possibly happen bad once he had a dead son behind him? I know him now! —Gus, he overloaded himself with mink and took such chances because he was . . . guaranteed. The baby would die, it had to because he wanted it so much —and once it was dead everything else would be safe. This was his curse; he would finally pay for his happiness. And then we'd be safe, don't you see? I was going to live like a queen, he said. I never understood why he kept saying that! "After the baby you'll live like a queen!" He was sure, don't you see how sure he was?

(A sardonic smile has grown on her face, she looks up the stairway as though seeing him.) And he came out of my room and down these stairs. . . .

(Turns to them.) And there was no guarantee any more! The baby was healthy as a calf . . . and he still had no curse. He wasn't safe any more. Anything could still happen. Again he'd got what he wanted. Now he had everything, now he really had it all. And the God or the devil he lives by hadn't been paid. I know him now, Gus!

(She moves toward the windows, right.) And he walks to the window, and looks out on his cages. The guarantee was off . . . he had his son . . . it was the mink then, the only things he'd ever made himself . . . and that would never do!

(Turning to them again.) That was too much. So he turns to you, J.B., and suddenly he's losing on the gas station, the quarry . . . anything but the mink. And he wakes at night and tells me he's losing the quarry, and tells you in the afternoons that the station is going, and talks as though talking could steer his devil where he wanted him to strike. And he waits and waits but the quarry stands . . . and the baby grows . . . and the mink are big . . . he's waiting, he's waiting . . . where will it come, what will it smash! And suddenly . . .

(Looks up and out the windows.) the sky breaks open . . . thunder . . . hail banging on the cages . . . and this is it!

(Turns to them.) This is his night! He pays tonight!

(She goes to the door, left, and swings it open.) It's still hailing!

(Turns to them, hysterically joyful.) It hasn't stopped! They'll die in their cages!

(Goes to *Gus* and grasps his jacket.) It's over tonight! They'll die and it's over!

(Neither *Gus* nor *J.B.* react excepting like men wanting to tell her something and yet afraid to.)

(Pleadingly.) He'll be all right! They're going to die! He's been waiting for this since the day he was born!

(She releases *Gus,* steps away.) I won't have a doctor. He'll be all right. I know what I'm saying!

J.B.: I know . . . but, Hester, y'see he can't lose those mink.

HESTER (Pointing outside): But he will, he has to!

J.B. (His apparent secret holds her): But he dasn't. See, he borrowed to buy that many. I gave him my oath not to tell you, but everything he's got is mortgaged to the hilt on those animals.

(Slight pause.)

HESTER (Softly): Oh, how sure he was . . . !

J.B.: I guess so. He must've felt pretty guaranteed, now that I look back on it. The thing is, he'll only have his forty per cent piece of the shop if the mink do go. Gus still hasn't signed on that.

HESTER: But the house. We'll have the house. . . .

J.B.: Not if they go. Davey's clean if that ranch folds up. He's clean, Hester.

(She stares wide-eyed at him.) Frankly, Baby, I was going to come over tonight even before you called me. . . . Because I frankly am afraid of what he's going to do if they go down tonight.

HESTER (With half the conviction she had before. Quietly): But it'll be over then. He's been waiting for this. . . .

GUS: No, not *this,* Hester.

(He goes to her, takes her arms in his grip.) A crack he has been waiting for, yes. But not his whole life to be washed away. A man might want to pay, but he does not bargain to be destroyed. He wanted his hands to be slapped—the baby he could even bear to lose—but when you put the hands out you do not expect the arms to be cut off. He was caught, you see? He banked on a death, and he was caught. And now he is twice shamed, you have no idea how ashamed he is for what he has done. And I don't know what he will do with himself in such a state of mind. Now don't cry now; Hester, you must. . . .

(She breaks out into a terrible sobbing. He shakes her, then, once, violently.) Hester! Stop it! You will stop this!

(She quiets.)

HESTER (Helplessly): Gus . . . .
GUS: I will go outside and get him. I will put him in my car. We will go.
HESTER (Realizing): Where?
GUS: Away from here. Any place away for tonight.
HESTER: Where!
GUS: I will take him to the city.
HESTER: I won't have a doctor near him!
GUS (Puts her aside and strides toward the rack): You will have a doctor near him!
HESTER: You won't take him! Gus, he's too proud! You don't know Davey, he'll kill himself for shame . . . !
GUS (Turning on her): For shame, yes! For shame if you leave him out there and those animals die! *What will he do, Hester!* To believe a baby will not live is not far from wishing him dead. You know that as good as I. He wished him dead, God help him, and now this catastrophe comes down on everything he wanted to guarantee by that wish. For shame, yes!—what will he do now for shame? Do you know? I do not! He goes to the city tonight!

(In fright at this first expression of *Gus's* own fright, she backs from him as the phone rings.)

J.B. (Going to phone): That must be for me. I told Lennie I'd be back right away.

(Thinks of *Hester,* pointing at himself.) Great lover.

(He goes to phone.)

(In phone.) Hello. No, this J. B. Feller. He's outside.

(Glances at *Hester.*) Well, yeh, she's here, just a minute.

(Holds phone out for her.) Sounds like that Harry Bucks . . . that mink fella.

HESTER (Going to phone): This time of night?

(Takes the phone.) Hello? Yes, I can tell him, what is it?

(As she listens a new stage of fright appears on her face.) Oh! But I think he has, he was grinding feed before, he must have fed them by now.

(She listens.) I'll go right out . . . sure . . . I'll tell him right now. Can you come over here? Does he know what to do? All right, I'll tell him, but you come. Hurry, please!

(She hangs up and runs to *Gus's* coat and holds it out for him.) Tell him, tell Davey . . . !

GUS (Putting on the coat): What happened!
HESTER: The mink . . . tell him to stop the feeding! The load of fish he got this morning are diseased. . . . Harry's got part of the same load . . . it killed forty of his mink . . . go, don't let him feed!
J.B. (Rushing to the door): For God's sake, come on! He's killing his mink!

(*Hester* turns her head quickly as *J.B.'s* shout penetrates her. She fastens on *J.B.* as *Gus* goes toward the door buttoning his coat, saying . . .)

GUS: Get Bucks out there as soon as he comes.

(With an indistinguishable word of pleading and at first half-decided sound, she grasps *Gus's* sleeve and holds him back, staring at *J.B.* as though on the edge of decision.) What?

HESTER: Stay here.

(*Gus*, struck silent, stands stock-still.)

J.B. (Pointing outside): But, Hester. . . .

HESTER: No. . . .

(She quickly goes to the door and closes it, as *Gus,* without a word, grasps the doorknob to pull it open. She takes hold of *Gus.*) No . . . he'll wait the rest of his life for it to happen. I want it over, I want it now.

GUS: You want to destroy a man? It is a man out there—use your mind—he is trying to find out how good he is; an honest man, he don't want what he don't deserve. These mink will die in his hands, he will know for sure then—then he will first *know* he was never any good, that everything came to him only from his luck!—and you will have not a husband but a wreck, a broken dwarf crawling under the sky, waiting for what will hit him next. It will break him in his heart, Hester!

(He breaks from her and starts opening the door. Again she presses herself against it.)

HESTER: It will . . . but not if he . . . if . . . .

(Pause.) Gus, go. Bring him here. Don't tell him. Just tell him to come here.

J.B.: What are you going to do?

HESTER: It's only one thing he's got to do. And if he won't . . . or he can't . . . then. . . . Go on. Hurry.

(Pressing *Gus* out.) Just tell him to come here. Nothing else.

GUS: Do you know what you're doing!

HESTER (With all her command): You do as I say, both of you!

(Then, womanly and strained.) Please, Gus. I know!

(*Gus* goes.)

J.B. (Starts toward the ledgers): I'd better take these. . . .

HESTER: He won't need them any more. Go. Please. Thanks, J.B. . . . and go on home.

(He stands perplexed.) It's all come down to just . . . Davey and I. Please.

J.B. (Without understanding, he goes to her and kisses her cheek): I don't understand, Baby. But God bless you . . . and all your little chickens.

(He turns and goes out, closing the door. She waits a moment after he is gone, then goes to the ledgers and puts them out of sight in a cabinet. She automatically starts to straighten a couch cushion and then a lampshade knocked askew, when she comes to a halt and looks around the room like one who is about to depart a place well loved. She is at the point of tears, touching the bright curtains on a window, turning her eyes across the walls. At the window her attention is caught by *David,* unseen by us, who is running from the barn, downstage and offstage right. Her gaze follows him until he disappears from her sight around the downstage side of the house. As she turns to the door, left, *David* is heard running toward it. He bursts into the room.)

DAVID: What's happened!
HESTER (Goes to him with the calmest smile she can manage): Catch your breath, darling.
DAVID (Turns around toward door, left): Where'd Gus go off to? He told me you. . . .
HESTER: Gus had to go home. Did you start feeding yet?
DAVID: Yeh, I started. Why?
HESTER: They're feeding now? All of them?
DAVID (With mounting premonition): Well, sure. I just loaded the cups when you called me.
HESTER (Goes to door and stands against it): I never asked you to do anything you didn't want to do. But I want you to stay in here till I finish telling you what I want to tell you. Don't go out till I finish.

(*David* looks questioningly at her.)

HESTER: Harry Bucks called up.
DAVID (Hoarsely): Bucks? Called up?
HESTER: He said for me to tell you that the fish you both got this morning were contaminated.
(His body becomes rigid; an inarticulate cry escapes him.) It killed forty of his mink before he caught it. He's on his way over here.

(*David*, with a terrible groan, rushes for the door.)

(Grasping his coat and trying to break him from the door.) Don't go out! Let me finish! *Davey, let me finish!*
DAVID (Trying to release himself): They're feeding! There's still time!
HESTER: They've got to die, Davey!
DAVID: Die!

(Looks at her in horror, then starts for the door.)

HESTER: Let me finish or you'll never see me again! I'll take the baby out of this house, I'll take him tonight!
DAVID (Halts, shocked): Out of the house! What do you mean, out of the house?
HESTER: I'm not going to have him learn his words from a man who shakes at every rumbling in the sky, and looks in all the corners of the dark for a devil that isn't there.
DAVID (As though to cut her off, he makes to embrace her): Hester . . . !
HESTER (Refusing his arms): He's not going to look to devils for what he'll have in the world. . . .
DAVID: Stop it. Stop that!
HESTER: No matter what he comes to own he'll never believe he has to pay for it with the life of his son!

(In a sea of guilt *David* moves a wayward step away from her; sounds of words start from his throat.)

HESTER: Shame is no good, Davey. It's got to come out; you wanted him dead. . . .
DAVID: I'd kill myself if anything happened to him. I'd . . . !
HESTER: Because you love him now. I know you love him. But you wished it, Davey, and I know what made you wish it. That's what's got to go, and tonight!
DAVID (Bursting out): It was for you, Hess!
HESTER: I know, I know!
DAVID: . . . I never wanted any-

thing for myself, I dreamed . . . I dreamed . . . I dreamed he'd come dead . . . and then everything would go calm and even and nothing bad would happen any more. How could I stop a dream!
HESTER: And how can I live in this house until I know a dream like that can never come again? What made that dream, Davey? This waiting and waiting for something to strike. As long as you wait for that I don't want you. I don't want you that way, Davey.

(*David*, as though sensing her next demand, lays a hand on the doorknob.)

HESTER (Not physically going to stop him): It's got to strike, Davey! Sooner or later or you'll never rest! Don't leave the house!
DAVID (At the door): You don't understand . . . everything we own is in those cages.
HESTER: I know that. J.B. was here. . . .
DAVID: But there'll be nothing left if they go! You'll be poor, you'll have nothing!

(He opens the door.)

HESTER: Goodbye, then! I'm saying goodbye, Davey!
DAVID (Turns full around; frantically): Why must they die! *Why must they die, Hester!*
HESTER (On his hesitation at going, she moves quickly to him): It's not that they must die. It's that you've got to kill them. You'll never rest until you've had a great smash down, and this is the night you thought it would come . . . you know it's the truth! Let it come then, but I want you to do it, and I want you to know once and for all that it was you who did it!
DAVID (Struck, as though a whole new vista suddenly opened): Me? *Me?*
HESTER (Now sensing the break in his darkness, she grasps his face between her hands): Only you, Davey! Whatever it is that hangs over your head, take it in your hands and kill it now! Whatever it is, you're better, you're greater. . . . Davey, you're a good man, good with your hands; you've always been a good man! Understand it!

(He turns slowly toward the open door as though feeling the dying of his mink.)

(She steps away from him as though from a child first learning to stand.)

DAVID: . . . They're dying . . . everything I ever had. . . .
(He calls out as though for her voice to hold him.) Hester!
HESTER: Stand here, Davey! Don't go out. You are the lightning, you are the banging hail! Do you see it, do you understand what happened? You are the god now; there was nothing in the sky that gave you things, nothing that could take them away! It was always you, Davey. Stand here! Smash it down!

(Flash of headlights against the windows electrifies them.)

DAVID (Points outside toward approaching car, and turns to her wide-eyed and hoarse): It's Harry . . . it's Harry Bucks. . . .
HESTER (Quietly, as though to throw the decision entirely on him): He'll help you . . . if you like. I guess there's still time . . . if you like.

(He quickly shuts the door and holds

it shut as though to postpone. . . . He stands taut and erect, hardly breathing.)

DAVID: Hester. . . .
HESTER: Whatever you want to do. . . .
DAVID: They're the only things that are really mine.
HESTER: Everything you have is really yours.
DAVID: Half the quarry's mine; could I build a quarry or half of it? The shop is mine with all the tractors there, could I build a tractor in a thousand years! I stood in the world with money in my hands and everything was "mine"! It was not *mine,* nothing is mine but what I'm good enough to make. Money is a bitch, Hester, it's a whore bitch that'll bear for any man and what it bears can never be really yours. Only these animals are mine. In the whole world they're the only things that would have died if I weren't there to make them live!

(Knocking on the door.)

I've looked all my life for something I could say belonged to me, and now you want to take them away! Why! Why!
HESTER: . . . Swear to me, Davey, swear one thing. If you save them tonight you'll never wait again for something to strike. I'll know tomorrow if you lie!
DAVID (As though trying to lie . . . to make other terms): Hess. . . .

(He stops.)

HESTER: It's too late, you see? You've got to know what did it once and for all . . . and this is the only way. I think it's the only way to end it, Davey!
DAVID: Hester. . . .

(Knocking on the door.)

HESTER (Quietly, with trepidation): You'd better let him in.

(*David* turns as though in a vise, opens the door and steps back. *Harry Bucks* enters. He is about to speak in excitement, then stops as he looks from *David's* face to *Hester.*)

BUCKS: (To *David*): You lost some, heh?

(*David* is unable to speak.)

BUCKS (Glances at *Hester*; then to *David*): What's the matter? . . . Lost them, heh?
DAVID: No.
BUCKS (With a sudden smile): You didn't lose *any*?
DAVID (As though for the first time, his breath comes): No, I caught it before they started feeding.
(He moves now . . . into the room further.) We just were having a . . .
(Laughs hollowly.) Little set-to about something else.
HESTER: Thanks a lot anyway for coming over!
BUCKS: Oh that's all right. Just thought I could pitch in. I mean I know the feeling . . . it's awful. It's like poisoning your own mink.
(To *David.*) Lost forty-three myself. Well, I better be getting back. I'll see you soon again. . . .
(Opens the door.) Sure you don't need any help now? Long as I'm here.
DAVID: . . . No. Everything's under control, thanks.

BUCKS (In the doorway he looks once more at David, and cocking his head wondrously, and scratching it): God Almighty, Frieber, you sure are a lucky man.

DAVID (He glances at *Hester*. His voice quavering, a taut, tired smile on his face): Yeh, Harry . . . I guess I am at that.

BUCKS: Well . . . good night.

DAVID: . . . Good night.

(*Bucks* goes. For a long time neither of them moves. *David* is staring at the door. He turns his head to *Hester*, and meets her smile with a still querulous expression. As though trying to find his proper mood, he turns about and walks as though dazed toward the right windows and stands looking out. He turns presently and slowly goes to the couch and lets himself into it. She silently sits in a chair near him. Staring straight ahead he slowly seems to relax, and then an enormous sigh comes out of him. He squints and blinks a little as though coming alive after a long sleep. And then he turns and looks at *Hester*.)

DAVID (With tremendous and quiet astonishment): We've got . . . nothing! I mean . . . it's all . . . gone! Can you . . . *feel it?*

HESTER: Um-hm.

DAVID (A smile grows on his face; he stretches and looks about him): I mean it's . . . *gone.*

HESTER (She smiles with new hope): I never wanted all those things, Davey.

DAVID (He laughs a little wondering laugh): Neither did I, I guess. We're kinda . . . right back where we began, Hester. You . . . you know that?

HESTER: You've got the shop. It's a good shop.

DAVID: Haven't got it, exactly . . . but I can work there. Sixty-forty. That's just about the right percentage, too.

(With great happiness.) That's just about right. He always was a little better at it than I am . . . except I somehow don't feel ashamed about it now.

(Both their heads go up, looking upstairs. She gets up and their eyes meet.)

HESTER: . . . I'll be right down. He wants his food.

(Slight pause.)

DAVID (Rising): Could I go up with you? And watch?

HESTER: If you want to.

(Her last question . . . as though remorselessly to lay every last remnant of the past.) Your hands are. . . .

(He looks at his hands and rubs them once, carelessly.)

DAVID (Half questioning for her assent and belief): Oh, I can wash that off.

HESTER (She nods thankfully): All right.

(They go to the landing and walk up the stairs as . . .)

SLOW CURTAIN

Notes on the Contributors

PAUL ALEXANDER BARTLETT was born in Moberly, Missouri, and attended school in various parts of the United States. For the past four years he has been living in Mexico. His work has appeared in *The Saturday Review of Literature, Mexican Life Magazine, North American Review, The Oregonian, New Mexico Quarterly* and other magazines. At present he is at work on a novel.

BETTY BAUR is the author of THE WHITE QUEEN, a novel. She studied at New Jersey College for Women and completed her education at Cambridge University, remaining in England for four years. It was this period, England before Munich, that set the background for her novel. Until recently she worked in a defense factory in Connecticut, helping to build planes. She is now at work on a new novel.

JANE BOWLES was born in New York City. She has written one novel, TWO SERIOUS LADIES, which was published in 1943. Mrs. Bowles lived in Mexico for several years. She is married to the composer Paul Bowles.

PRUDENCIO DE PEREDA was born in Brooklyn 32 years ago, of Spanish parents. He attended parochial school and public high school, worked for a degree at the College of the City of New York, and subsequently spent some years in Spain. His stories have appeared in *Story, Twice-A-Year, The New Republic, New Masses, Partisan Review* and most of the "little" magazines throughout the country; also in a number of the O'Brien anthologies. At present he is a private first class in the Army Specialized Training Corps.

FREDERICK EBRIGHT was born in Altoona, Pa. He attended art school in Philadelphia, then went to work for a large oil-refining company. In 1939 he enlisted in the Army and at present is a technical sergeant in the Finance Department of the Air Corps, stationed in the Aleutians. His work has appeared in *The Virginia Quarterly, The New Republic, The Nation, The American Poet, Commonweal* and other magazines.

RALPH ELLISON, a leading young Negro writer, was born in Oklahoma City in 1914. After graduating from high school he attended a Southern college, majoring in music. He has been living in New York since 1937 and during this period was an editor of *The Negro Quarterly*. His work has been published in *New Masses, Direction, Negro World Digest, Common Ground, Tomorrow* and other magazines. At present he is serving with the Merchant Marine.

MORTON FINEMAN writes that he "was born in Cleveland, grew up in Philadelphia, and feels happiest in New

York." His stories have appeared in *Harper's Bazaar, Mademoiselle, Story* and other magazines, and for the last three successive years his work has been starred or reprinted in the O'Brien collection.

CHARLES HENRI FORD has contributed to most of the avant-garde reviews here and abroad, and is editor of the art and literary quarterly, *View*. He is the author of a novel, THE YOUNG AND EVIL, written in collaboration with Parker Tyler and published in Paris, and four collections of his poems have been published since 1936: A PAMPHLET OF SONNETS, THE GARDEN OF DISORDER, ABC's and THE OVERTURNED LAKE. The present poem is from the manuscript in progress, THIRTY VARIATIONS OF A HUNDRED LINES.

JEAN GARRIGUE has published poems in *Kenyon Review, Partisan Review, Accent, The New Republic* and *Horizon,* and will be represented in the New Directions volume, FIVE YOUNG AMERICAN POETS, to be published in 1944.

WILL GIBSON is 29 years old and lives in Topeka, Kansas. He teaches piano there and does free-lance rewrite work. His stories and poems have appeared in magazines here and in England, including *Poetry Folios, Esquire, New Stories, Household Magazine, The University Review, Harper's Bazaar* and *Poetry.*

BRENDAN GILL was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1914. He graduated from Yale in 1936, and has been a contributor to *The New Yorker* since that time. His stories have also appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, The American Magazine, Good Housekeeping, Liberty, The Virginia Quarterly* and many other magazines. He is married, has three children, and lives in New York and Norfolk, Conn.

SAUL GOTTLIEB was born in the Bronx, N. Y., in 1923. He was one of the founders of The Young American Writer, affiliated with the League of American Writers, and has written for the New Theater League and C.I.O. Theater Council. His poems have appeared in *Poetry, Accent* and *Poetry Folios,* and one of his short stories was published in Penguin New Writing.

EDWIN HONIG was born in Brooklyn in 1919. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin he worked in the Documents Division of the Library of Congress and taught English for one semester at Purdue University. He is the author of FREDERICO GARCÍA LORCA, a biography of the Spanish poet, and his poetry, articles, reviews and translations have appeared in *Poetry, New Mexico Quarterly, Sewanee Review, Voices* and other magazines. His work is also included in the HEART OF EUROPE anthology and the forthcoming NEW DIRECTIONS ANNUAL. Mr. Honig is now serving as a private in the United States Army.

LANGSTON HUGHES was born in Joplin, Missouri, but has lived all over the world. At various times he has been seaman in Africa, Cuba, Holland, France, Italy and Spain; doorman in Montmartre night clubs; beachcomber in Genoa; busboy in Washington; scenario writer in Moscow. He is the author of NOT WITHOUT LAUGHTER, a novel, WAYS OF WHITE FOLKS, a collection of short stories, and three volumes of poetry: FINE CLOTHES TO THE JEW, THE DREAM KEEPER and WEARY BLUES. His most recent work was his autobiography, titled THE BIG SEA. His stories have appeared in *Harper's Magazine, Esquire, The New Yorker,* etc.

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN is a member of the staff of *The New Yorker,* currently on leave of absence to write a book on the method of literary criticism, which will be published early in 1945. His reviews and critical articles have appeared in *Accent, The Antioch Review, The New Republic* and a number of other periodicals.

SHIRLEY JACKSON has contributed many stories to *The New Yorker,* and other magazines, and is now at work on a volume of short stories which will be published early in 1945.

CHRISTOPHER LAZARE is 30 years old. For the past ten years he has done a great deal of writing, translating and editing, but this is his first short story. His articles have appeared in *The Nation, The New Republic, The New Yorker, Mademoiselle,* etc. He collaborated with Walter Pach on MASTERPIECES OF ART and has written many articles on painting. He has done translations from the German and French, including works of Ludwig Marcuse, Lion Feuchtwanger, André Gide, Jules Romains, Colette and others. Mr. Lazare was associate editor of *Decision,* is art editor of the *North American Review* and editor-in-chief of the French-American publishing house, Didier.

NORMAN MACLEOD is an instructor at the University of Maryland, in charge of the Creative Writing Program. He grew up and attended school in just about every state in the West. He has worked on cattle and sheep ranches in Wyoming and at one time was Park Ranger at Glacier National Park and later Superintendent of the Petrified Forest National Monument in Arizona. He is the author of two novels, YOU GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR and THE BITTER ROOTS, and four collections of poetry: HORIZONS OF DEATH, THANKSGIVING BEFORE NOVEMBER, WE THANK YOU ALL THE TIME and the forthcoming A MAN IN MIDPASSAGE.

NORMAN MAILER was born in Long Branch, N. J., in 1923, but has lived most of his life in Brooklyn. He graduated from Harvard in June, 1943. Several of his stories appeared in *The Harvard Advocate,* of which he was an editor, and one of them won *Story Magazine's* college contest for 1941. He has almost completed a novel, and expects to be inducted into the Army shortly.

LENORE MARSHALL is the author of two novels, ONLY THE FEAR and HALL OF MIRRORS, and a volume of poetry, NO BOUNDARY; this is her first short story. Before she settled down to writing she worked at a number of other jobs, including that of literary editor in a publishing house. She was graduated from Barnard College, is married, and has a son and a daughter.

ARTHUR MILLER is 28 years old. After graduating from high school in Brooklyn, he worked at odd jobs for a year then decided to go to college. Accordingly, he says, he "saved enough money for one semester and went to the University of Michigan because I heard they gave writing prizes there. In my sophomore year I won the Avery Hopwood Award in drama with my first play, which is noteworthy because it was written in four days during Spring vacation. Since I had seen only two plays—and those in my childhood from which I remembered nothing—and had read about three others, I could only decide to end the acts by asking a friend how long an act took. I adopted his estimate and won the award." Soon after this Mr. Miller won the Bureau of New Plays Prize and another Hopwood award—both of these before he graduated from college. For the past four years he has written radio plays, worked in a box factory, been shipfitter's helper in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He has just returned from a month's trip through eight Army camps to gather material for a picture about the Army and is now in Hollywood writing the screen picture. It is likely that THE MAN WHO HAD ALL THE LUCK will shortly have a Broadway production, and it is very possible that another of Mr. Miller's plays will be produced at the same time. "Why everything had to happen at once I don't know," he writes. "There have been months of my life when I did nothing but sit in Brooklyn with my feet on the radiator, whole rainy months."

EDITA MORRIS was born in Sweden and lived there until she was 21. Since then she has traveled extensively, living in England, North Africa, the Near East, Mexico and South America. She is now residing in the United States and is married to the American writer, I. V. Morris. She is the author of the recently published MY DARLING FROM THE LIONS, and her stories have appeared in many magazines and in both the O'Brien and O. Henry anthologies.

CARL RUTHVEN OFFORD was born in Trinidad, B. W. I. Since coming to the United States he has worked as newspaper reporter and editor in New York City, and has contributed to such magazines as *The Nation* and *Direction*. His first novel, THE WHITE FACE, was published in 1943, and he completed a second novel just before he was inducted into the U. S. Army. He is now attached to a Negro Port Company.

ROSEMARY PARIS was born in Africa. Because her parents nourished a persistent wanderlust she grew up in England, Switzerland and the Hawaiian islands. She had whatever schooling was available in each place, and this somewhat irregular education was topped off by four years at Vassar. She is married to Arthur Mizener, a faculty member of Wells College, and has a six-year-old daughter. THE LAST DAY is her first published story.

PAUL PETERS writes: "I have spent altogether too many years writing for newspapers and magazines. At one time or another I edited a weekly newspaper in Illinois, knocked about Europe, taught school, bummed restlessly around the forty-eight States, worked in miscellaneous, semi-skilled capacities in heavy industry, was foreign editor of the defunct *Literary Digest,* drama, movie and book editor of *Life,* and am now drama editor in the New York story department of Twentieth Century-Fox. I co-authored STEVEDORE, a Negro play produced by the Theater Union, and also a few plays that flopped."

ROBERT RAMSEY was born in Memphis, Tenn., and educated at the University of Arkansas and the University of Alabama. His first novel, FIRE IN SUMMER, was published in 1942. That same year he was awarded a Rosenwald Fellowship in creative writing. Since that time his short stories have been published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines. At present he is an ensign in the United States Navy. He is married and has a three-year-old son.

LEONARD W. ROBINSON was born in Malden, Mass., in 1912. After graduating from Columbia University, he worked for *Newsweek,* the pulps, and free-lanced. He has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* and at present is associate managing editor of *Parade,* which, he tells us, is the thirteenth largest magazine in the world.

NANCY WILSON ROSS was born and grew up in the Far West and has traveled in Europe, Asia and America. She has the distinction of crossing this country four times in a trailer house. She was a student at the Bauhaus in Germany in the thirties, while Hitler was rising to power. She has written four books: TAKE THE LIGHTNING, FARTHEST REACH, the Story of Oregon and Washington, THE WAVES and the soon-to-be-published WESTWARD THE WOMEN. At present she is working on a new novel, of which I, MY ANCESTOR is a segment.

NORMAN ROSTEN is the author of two books of poems, RETURN AGAIN, TRAVELLER and THE FOURTH DECADE. While at the University of Michigan he received the Avery Hopwood Award both in poetry and drama, and later was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in poetry (1941-42). Two of his plays have been produced in New York, THIS PROUD PILGRIMAGE and FIRST STOP TO HEAVEN, and he has written radio scripts for the U. S. Treasury Department, the O.W.I., the Council for Democracy and other "war" groups. At present he is at work on a long narrative poem dealing with the Alcan Highway, to which the present poem is the prologue.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER is the author of two novels, DR. TRANSIT and FROM THE KINGDOM OF NECESSITY, and two volumes of poetry, THE TEMPTATION OF ANTHONY AND OTHER POEMS and COMRADE MISTER AND OTHER POEMS. He was twice awarded Guggenheim Fellowships for creative writing and is currently at work on a new novel.

IRWIN STARK teaches English in a New York City high school. Among the magazines in which his poetry and prose have appeared are *Twice-A-Year*, *Crisis*, *Christian Century*, *Westminster Review* and *Coronet*.

MARJORIE STENGEL was born in Pittsburgh, Pa., but has lived longer in New York than anywhere else. She has done a lot of ghost-writing and has already published a few short stories under her own name.

HENRY STONE is a native New Yorker. Although he has been writing for some time, this is his first published work. He was granted an honorable discharge from the Army in 1942 and now practises law in New York City.

ROBERT TALLMAN has been chief writer and associate editor of the March of Time radio program and free-lanced the radio field as writer of no less than sixty full-length original dramas broadcast over the major networks. A number of these, including two written in collaboration with Carl Sandburg and the late Stephen Vincent Benét, won awards as the best radio dramas of the years in which they were broadcast. He is currently under contract as screenwriter for Twentieth Century-Fox. A collection of his poems is scheduled for publication this year.

JOHN D. WEAVER, a native of Warren County, Virginia, is 32 years old. A graduate of William and Mary College, he received his M. A. degree from George Washington University and spent the next five years as feature writer, reporter and copy editor on the *Kansas City Star*. In 1940 he resigned from the *Star* to devote full time to writing. The next two years saw the publication of his novel, WIND BEFORE RAIN, and short stories and articles in such magazines as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Esquire*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *American Mercury*, etc. In 1941 he was co-winner of an *Atlantic* short story award. Last year Mr. Weaver enlisted in the Army, and at present is a sergeant in the U. S. Signal Corps.

ROBERT WHITTINGTON was born in Rochester, N. Y., in 1912. He has worked as teacher, machinist, dramatist and lecturer, and, like the bards of old, has appeared on the road in his own work. At present he is preparing a volume of his poems for publication and is completing a novel. His work has appeared in *Poetry* and other magazines.

JAY WILLIAMS has been a comedian in burlesque, vaudeville and night clubs, and has worked as theatrical press agent for the Group Theater, Hollywood Theater Alliance and other producers. In 1941 he was inducted into the Army and discharged after a year of duty. He then handled the New York publicity for Russian War Relief, leaving this organization to devote himself to writing. His first book, THE STOLEN ORACLE, was published in 1943; his second book, THE COUNTERFEIT AFRICAN, should be out this year. Mr. Williams collaborated with Kurt Adler on SONGS OF MANY WARS; he has also done radio scripts for the O.W.I., and for a year wrote the story and dialogue for the comic strip *Scorchy Smith.* Right now he is again serving as a private in the U. S. Army.

OSCAR WILLIAMS is the author of THE GOLDEN DARKNESS and the more recent THE MAN COMING TOWARD YOU, both collections of poems. He has edited three anthologies of verse, NEW POEMS for 1940, 1942 and 1943, and at present is at work on a new book of poems, to be titled INVISIBLE MENDING.

HELEN WOLFERT is a native New Yorker. After her graduation from Hunter College she taught in the New York public schools. Her short stories and poems have appeared in *The New Republic, Poetry, Glamour, Common Sense, Harper's Bazaar* and *The American Poet.* The present poem is a section of a long narrative poem, NOTHING IS A WONDERFUL THING. She is married to Ira Wolfert and has two children, a daughter and a son.

IRA WOLFERT is the author of TUCKER'S PEOPLE, a novel, and BATTLE FOR THE SOLOMONS and TORPEDO 8. For the dispatches collected in BATTLE FOR THE SOLOMONS, Mr. Wolfert was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Telegraphic Reporting for 1942.

RICHARD WRIGHT, probably the outstanding Negro writer in the United States today, is the author of NATIVE SON. His first book, UNCLE TOM'S CHILDREN, a collection of stories, won the *Story Magazine* WPA Writers Prize. Mr. Wright is now at work on a new novel.